



VISVA-BHARATI
LIBRARY



PRESENTED BY

Mrs, Bosi Sen's.
Estate, Almora.

THE HOUND OF ULADH

OTHER
KALÂKSHETRA BOOKS
BY
JAMES H. COUSINS

COLLECTED POEMS (1894-1940)

Rs. 3

THE FAITH OF THE ARTIST

Rs. 3-8

The above books and
"The Hound of Uladh"
are printed on paper
made in India, and
are bound in cloth
woven by Kalakshetra's
own workers.



MYSORE, 1942

VASU, MYSORE, 1942

THE HOUND OF ULADH

TWO PLAYS
IN VERSE

BY
JAMES H. COUSINS

KALÂKSHETRA
ADYAR, MADRAS, INDIA
1942

All Rights Reserved

Printed by C. Subbarayudu, at the Vasanta Press, Adyar, Madras.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Publishers' Note	vii
Author's Foreword	ix
Preface to "The King's Wife"	3
THE KING'S WIFE	7
Preface to "The Hound of Uladh"	69
References in "The Hound of Uladh"	79
THE HOUND OF ULADH	86
Reviews	272

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

KALÂKSHETRA (an International Art Centre) was established in 1935 at Adyar, Madras, India, with the aim of fostering interest in the fine arts and art-crafts from the point of view both of idealistic creative expression and the beautifying of life. At its headquarters it is gathering a representative selection of objects of world-art. In its workshops and studios it is training Indian boys and girls to follow the finest ideals and technique of the arts and crafts of India and at the same time to profit by true advances in art elsewhere. Its work is under the immediate guidance of its founder, Srimati Rukmini Devi, a world-travelled student of arts and crafts, and herself at the peak of artistic achievement as an exponent of the classical Indian dance, *Bharata-natya*.

Realising the value of book-production of an artistic order, Kalakshetra added publication to its activities. It has given books to the world that are themselves works of art in get-up, and that are either concerned with the arts or are works of idealistic creative literature.

Professor Cousins' new book, "The Hound of Uladh," which Kalakshetra now publishes, follows the author's "Collected Poems" (1940) and "The Faith of the Artist" (1941). The reception of the foregoing volumes has been most encouraging, and opens up the prospect of a wide circulation of such books when the cessation of the war makes communication with countries outside India less protracted and hazardous. Kalakshetra is bold enough to believe that Professor Cousins' new book will be accepted by English-speaking readers as a first class contribution to the art of poetical drama which for some time past has been obscured by other less exacting forms of art but now shows signs of revival.

In their time and environment the two works are twenty centuries and two continents apart. Yet, in spite of their external differences, they are expressions of universal psychological realities conditioned by time and place, rather than merely "period-plays," and throw the light of poetry on some of the problems now agitating the mind of humanity.

For twenty years "The King's Wife," here reprinted a third time, has been regarded as a classic in its interpretation of the fundamental religious spirit of India in the finest of poetry. "The Hound of Uladh," now published for the first time, invites comparison with the work of the great poets with whom the author collaborated in the revival of Irish literature and drama half a century ago, AE and Yeats. It is longer than any similar work they produced; but, apart from quantity, those who have followed Professor Cousins' career as a poet will note the technical skill and freshness in the presentation of profound thought and reactions to beauty which Professor Cousins, in the seventh decade of his busy life, has not only maintained but excelled.

KALĀKSHETRA

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

I HAD thought of making this book a companion to my "Collected Poems," published by Kalakshetra in 1940, entrusting through it to the future my contributions to an indigenous stage under the early stimulus of the Irish literary and dramatic movement (in English) forty years ago, and two plays written since then. But I discovered that, through circumstances which need not be recounted here, four of my seven early plays had followed the first version of the first volume of Carlyle's "French Revolution" into oblivion. This so thinned my reliques of that era that I had to revise my thought and leave to destiny the publication of the three survivors of my early theatre interlude whose inclusion in this volume would be asymmetrical and out of focus. It happened also that "The Hound of Uladh," which was originally intended to be a drama, insisted on extensions at both ends of the dramatic section beyond the limits proper to a prologue and epilogue, and left me with what may be called a mythological fantasy, not, I hope, in the fantastic sense, but in the classical sense of making the invisible visible through the imagination. So the promise of a book of dramas comes down to two dramas with unpromised additions in both dramatic and lyrical verse.

The Prefaces to the two items of this book may look disproportionate, but are, I think, fitting. Knowledge of Hindu thought has so increased within recent years outside India that little or nothing in the way of annotation is needed to convey the import of "The King's Wife" to book-reading non-Indians, or, despite an alien education, to Hindu Indians, for whom the mother's-knee method of cultural transmission has preserved a love for their traditional lore.

It is different with "The Hound of Uladh" both in its own habitat and elsewhere. The ancient religion of Celtic Europe (that had spread as far as Asia Minor in the third century B.C. through the colonization of the Celtic Gauls of France, hence the Epistle to the Galatians) retired into the presumed harmlessness of mythology in front of the spread of Latinized Christianity, to become either an oral folk-memory, or a matter of merely archaeological interest through versions of the old songs and stories passed on by the monks of the Irish monasteries in or before the tenth century. In the Preface to "The Hound of Uladh" I have given some indication of the main features of one of the ancient world's major religions, and, I hope, sufficient details of the persons of the story and certain unfamiliar allusions in my paraphrastic rendering of it to serve the understanding of Celtic myth, as similar details serve the Greek and other mythologies and their subsequent literatures.

My writing of the two works in this book had not, of course, any intention beyond the fulfilment of a congenial artistic desire. Of one predilection, however, bearing on contemporaneous affairs, I shall make confession. I would not have chosen to write "The Hound of Uladh" in the darkening years between 1932 and 1942 if I had not perceived that under the appearances of a past culture and era moved the same human impulses, good and bad, as today move the vast majority of humanity; nor would I have responded imaginatively to the "modern" inferences that I have found in all ancient myths had I not felt in them the stretching of the human spirit towards a "golden age" (now called a New World Order) which may be reckoned by as many centuries or millennia as one has vision and hope to conceive, yet, to the individual, may be just an instant beyond the hour upon the clock.

The relation of ancient myth to modern "realistic" circumstances may not be at first sight obvious.. Yet the so-called realism of the present time has nothing fundamentally to do with the "facts" of daily press reports. These facts are not origins, but the external effects of the dark myth of racial and national superiority. The subjugation of the myth of evil will not be accomplished only at its own level and only with its own weapons. Nor will the repetition of the myth and its cataclysmic results in materials and character be prevented by a mere manipulation of the control of the substances of life in what is called economic reconstruction, or by the restraining of one phase of mental and emotional error by another. "Lasting peace" will not come only by an alteration of direction and emphasis in the organization of life through what is termed "a change of heart." These things are necessary to the future that will open out after the elimination of the Great Evil that possesses Central Europe and eastern Asia. But to make the secondary primary is to ask for a repetition of disaster by setting life against the currents of its highest nature. The crying necessity in speculations towards a "New World Order" today, as it has been in all the days of the lurid history of "civilization," is the attainment of vision, the vision of the Myth of Good, the myth of indivisible human kinship; a kinship of the spirit whose spontaneous and inevitable realistic effects will be, in the group, mutual reverence and kindness, universal sustenance, equality of opportunity, and peace; in the individual, consecration to the liberating of oneself from the demands of the lower nature, and the exalting, by the unobtrusive dynamism of example, of all beings into living community with the Great Life and its visible and invisible embodiments. Of this ultimate culmination of a real World Order I have made Cuchulain an

imaginary type; and in doing so, I have, I believe, but carried the saga an appropriate stage higher, as might a Bard who had awakened in the psychical and scientific knowledge of today without losing the memory of the vision of reality that a less sophisticated and confused era had given to him two thousand or more years ago.

Others may perform the office of spiritual interpretation through humanity's most sensitive and receptive medium, poetical myth, in a more impressive manner than I (long and far removed from the reinforcement of soil and tradition) have been able to do it in. But such as it is, I offer this mythological fantasy of her ancient and abiding and unfulfilled spiritual imagination to the Genius of the sacred and beautiful little island of Eiré in which I found birth; even as I offer, in "The King's Wife," my interpretation of the aspiration of India to the Spirit of that vast, ancient, wise and holy land in which I have spent twenty-seven years of increasing knowledge and experience and understanding of the realities and potentialities of my own life, and of the high destiny to which, through advances and retrogressions, the life of the race is moving.

J. H. C.

Kotagiri, Nilgiris, India,
September 1942.

THE KING'S WIFE

PREFACE TO "THE KING'S WIFE"

THE version of the story of Rani Mirabai of Mewar, saint, poetess and dancer, on which this play is based, is not in accordance with secular history, as I found long after the play had been written and performed. I hope, however, that the presentation of three types of religious expression (the spiritual adventure and breadth of Akbar, the simple devotion of Mira, the zealous orthodoxy of Kumbha) which are contemporaneous in all lands and ages, may, by the evocation of some measure of artistic pleasure and apprehension of things deeper than the words, provide compensation for historical discrepancy and such liberties as I have taken with the traditional story in order to bring it within the ambit of a work of dramatic art.

The story, being four centuries old, is far away from the external circumstances of Hindu and Muslim India today. Yet in it there are elements, such as a common aspiration towards the Divine Life and a mutual love of music (which in India is religious song), that no changes in the organization of life have affected, and that, to the optimistically minded, hold the promise of a spiritual and aesthetical unification beyond the temporary political divisions which India shares with the rest of the world in this time of universal confusion.

The songs of Mirabai in the drama are translations of the spirit and structure of the Hindi originals which are still sung in India. Her expression of her faith as a devotee of Krishna is in accordance with her songs and the "Bhagavad Gita."

"The King's Wife" was first published in 1919, and again in the second volume of the American edition of the author's collected poems in 1934.

The play has been performed in a number of the languages of India and Burma. Permission for performance should be obtained from Kalakshetra.

THE KING'S WIFE

MIRABAI, *Rani of Mewar, Rajputana.*

KUMBHA, *her husband, Rana of Mewar.*

AKBAR, *the Mogul Emperor.*

TANSEN, *his Court Poet, formerly a Hindu.*

TWO MINISTERS *of Kumbha.*

COURT JEWELLER *of Kumbha.*

MAID *of Mirabai.*

GUARD *of palace grounds.*

TWO CITIZENS *of Chitorgarh.*

BEGGAR.

At Chitorgarh, capital of Mewar.

Sixteenth century.

THE KING'S WIFE

I

Outside a temple of Krishna at Chitorgarh.

AKBAR and TANSEN come in, apparently from a journey. AKBAR is partially disguised as a Hindu.

TANSEN *is wholly so.*

TANSEN.

Here is our journey's end.

AKBAR. So this is the temple

That all the world is seeking for the sake
Of a queen's songs.

TANSEN. It is, Your Majesty.

And it would be a song most pitiful
That Akbar's legs were traitors to his feet,
And after these long miles of journeying
Flaunted discovery. A while ago
I died to Islam and was born a Hindu.

AKBAR.

That is no change of tune hard for a poet
Who slept a Hindu and awoke a Muslim.
There are more ways than one for finding God.

TANSEN.

But he is lost who tries two ways at once,
And *you* are stuck half way between the two,
Loins downward shamelessly a Mussulman.

AKBAR.

Why, aren't some Hindus trousered!

TANSEN.

Very true.

But there is something deeper than the fact
That has escaped you. Take a pair of trousers
From Muslim legs and put them on a Hindu's,
And they will seem like aliens of the race,
Even perverts from the Faith. No, no! Too much
Hangs from your waist to risk. Here, take this
cloth

That has the flavour of the far-off south,
And reincarnate quickly.

AKBAR.

If my limbs

Could ape the Hindu as quickly as your tongue
Resumes his language, I far more would fear
To lose myself in that which we assume
Than be unmasked. And so I rather choose
To don the Hindu than to drop the Muslim,
And, being both, be either at the need.

*(He has put on a Hindu dhoti—skirt—over his
trousers).*

TANSEN.

That's well. And now the risk is covered up.

AKBAR.

Twice you have spoken of risk. You are not
fearful?

TANSEN.

Hardly would fear have driven me on this chase

After a songbird for an emperor's game
To turn at the door of the nest. But I remember
The sanctity in which these Hindus hold
Their women. I have sung to you my song
Of how a Rajput and a Mogul king
Sprang to the clutch of death when kin of yours
Desired to look upon the haughty kin
Of her whose songs have drawn you here
disguised.

Are *you* so bloody-minded for a look
To tempt red Fate?

AKBAR (*proceeding to squat on the ground*).

I think Fate's embassy
Comes round the corner. Allah keep away
Occasion for a hasty rising!

TANSEN (*squatting beside Akbar*). Aye,
And Allah banish "Allah" from your tongue,
And give Your Majesty a proper god
To call on—

AKBAR. And to rinse "Your Majesty"
Out of your mouth whose word should but
become
Pilgrim to pilgrim on a holy quest.

TANSEN (*accepting the correction with a grimace*).
Farewell, O King! Hail, brother!
(*He makes a Muslim salaam, hand to ground
and up to forehead*).

AKBAR (*catching Tansen's hand*). There is less risk

In my two legs than your one hand. Narayana!
You will salaam us into the gaping jaws
Of these proud Rajput tigers. Brother! Thus.
(*He puts his two palms together and raises his
hands with the thumbs close to the forehead in a
Hindu salutation*).
Now for a song of Mira's.

TANSEN (*sings*).¹

Flowers plucked at dawn of day
Garlanded love's glad way,
Lord! at thy threshold I, thy flower-girl, lay.
Yea, and a fairer flower
From my heart's hidden bower.
Ah! let thy lips now speak the word of power,
Breaking to finer mould
The earth of me, to unfold
Fit blooms of grace for thee, Lord, to behold.
So shall my beaded throat
Find fuller, purer note
To sing thy name ; and I to thee devote
My house of nights and days
In song ; and of life's ways,
Joyous or sad, weave garlands in thy praise.
Flowers plucked at dawn of day,
Garlanded love's glad way,
Lord! at thy threshold, I, thy flower-girl, lay.

¹ *In the absence of the traditional melody the verses may be chanted.*

TWO CITIZENS *come in.*

FIRST CITIZEN (*finishing an argument*). .

There is the proof
Straight to the hand! Her songs are in the
mouth
Of high and low. (*To Tansen*) A pretty-looking
flower-girl
You'd make, my man!

TANSEN. Who knows, brother, who knows?
For contradiction lives but on the lips,
And when the heart goes with the song, ah!
then
The past sings in the present, and may bring
A flower-girl's music, or perhaps a queen's,
Into the roughest voice ; and one life back
My brother here may have been a king, or worse.
I am myself a poet. I shall sing
Something of my own making.

SECOND CITIZEN. Spare us, no!
We have enough of trouble in the kingdom
From two already. It is bad enough
That the king's temper thins with every song
That carries Mira's name from lip to lip,
Like leaves whose whispers waken jealousy.

TANSEN.
Only a poet is jealous of a poet,

But let that be. I have not journeyed here
From choice, but by compulsion of the will
Of this my brother (*indicating Akbar*).

FIRST CITIZEN. He is given to little speech,
If he be judge of song.

TANSEN. Ah! but he thinks
And thinks, and holds his thought with vast
control.

SECOND CITIZEN.
A power, no doubt, he gained by sovereign rule
In that last life!

TANSEN. Who knows, brother, who knows?
A king's deep homage would not bend amiss
Before a singing queen.

SECOND CITIZEN. Not in the mood
Of the queen's husband!

TANSEN. He takes a rival badly?

FIRST CITIZEN (*enjoying a story*).
That is but half the trouble. Long ago,
Before their youth had felt the weight of rule,
Mira and Kumbha with their blossoming songs
Pelted each other, with laughter and high looks
That made the kingdom all one voice of joy.

SECOND CITIZEN (*sharing in the enjoyment*).
But when the prince was lifted to the king
With Mira at his side, there came a change.

FIRST CITIZEN.

You know the Indus mouth, how it has piled
Kingdom to kingdom in its royal way
Gathered from far and near, yet like a king
Whose conquests crowd about him till his path
Must sideways find a way to the great sea?
So with these two. One life in them had flowed
Sweet as a singing river in the hills;
But with new power new appetite for power
Grew in King Kumbha, piling in his way
Obstruction to the soul.

SECOND CITIZEN.

So it is said

By those who move nearer the king than we
Plain citizens.

FIRST CITIZEN.

So, while the king, aloof,
Passed through ambition into discontent,
Hating the thing he coveted, the stream
Of love was turned to jealous undertow
That pulled their lives apart. And the
sweet queen
Gathered the world about her with her songs,
And grew in saintliness that stung the king
With dumb rebuke of what had passed him by.

SECOND CITIZEN.

You come from Akbar's country. Have you
not heard

How the Great Mogul whispers his desire
To hear the songs of Mira from her own lips?

TANSEN.

It is for such a rumour we have come.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Just so! and so King Kumbha broods and
chafes

With memory of an ancient deadly strife
Because a Mogul emperor essayed
To see the beauty of a Rajput queen
With his own eyes.

TANSEN (*riskily*). And what if he by stealth
Should see Queen Mira?

SECOND CITIZEN. Our kings would rather die
Than let pollution from an alien glance
Like subtle poison pass into the blood
Of their untainted race. And who shall say
What penalty might fall on one removed
One step from kingship, since the scale of pride
Holds life but lightly, that the throne be clean?
But that is out of count! We are at peace
With Akbar. Emperors do not leave their thrones
Unheralded by rumour, and no sound
Of such event has reached us.

FIRST CITIZEN. So let be
What will be. You have outstripped circum-
stance.

Queen Mira comes to worship, and may bring
A song to God, new-budded on the lake
Of her calm soul ; a lotus in the dawn,
That smiles to heaven, but holds a shining tear.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Oh! she has brought strange quiet on the world,
The exquisite sadness of things beautiful
That is more sweet than laughter. She has made
The heart's pure conquest lightly as a breath,
Because her hands are eloquent with love.

FIRST CITIZEN.

While power, that thunders on the stubborn will,
Smites the response—that leaps to her in joy.
Farewell. Our business takes us elsewhere,
But we shall come again.

SECOND CITIZEN. And you, good friends,
Let go humility, and put on pride
Because, for that past kingship you have left,
You shall forestall an emperor's desire,
And know perhaps what Akbar cannot know
Till he, like you, in some succeeding life,
Drop the rude mask of kingship, and, like you,
Put on the pilgrim's garb. Farewell.

AKBAR AND TANSEN (*remaining squatted on the
ground*). Farewell.

The TWO CITIZENS go out, making the Hindu salutation, to which Akbar and Tansen reply.

TANSEN (*making sure that they have gone*).

Brother, we sit in garments rather thin
Against a searching wind.

AKBAR. Yet thus we learn
The taste of the wind. So knowledge grows.

TANSEN. Is this
Close to your taste, or shall we tread no more
The hidden edge of danger?

AKBAR. Fearful again?

TANSEN.
Not for myself, for I can sing myself
Through any hole in a wall; and not for you,
For you have all the ready wit of the rook.

AKBAR.
But not its conversation!

TANSEN. Aptly said.
But why so silent?

AKBAR Shall I shout my name
In ears that may have heard my voice in battle?

TANSEN.
O well of wisdom! not for you I fear,
But fear for all the flame of jealous pride
That may consume *her*.

The music of a stringed instrument is heard.

AKBAR. Listen! (*He rises. Tansen also rises*).

MIRABAI'S VOICE comes from within the temple singing
to stringed music a song to the Lord Krishna.

Here in our courtyard, where the breeze
Bears odours of the champak trees,
And high in blue unclouded calm
Sways leisurely the fruited palm;
Come, Little One, at cool of day,
And on your flute soft music play.

AKBAR AND TANSEN *listen. Akbar with growing rapture.*
The Voice ceases, but the stringed music continues softly.

AKBAR (*moved*). If such can be
The disembodied spirit of her song,
What must its fulness be, when eye to ear
Adds beautiful to beauty?

TANSEN. We came to hear,
And hearing is all coolness to the flesh,
And sets the hand of distance on desire.
But sight may put the tinder's kindling spark
Against dried leaves.

AKBAR. O dull of comprehension!
Have you not learned that sight is half of
hearing,
And men in the dark hear less or more than real,
And mock the truth of day. No! We have come
For all Fate carries in her knotted cloth.

*He proceeds with the kingly stride of Akbar to go
to find the singer.*

TANSEN (*barring the way*).

Brother, I have wiped majesty off my lips.

Now take it from your step. We are pilgrims.

AKBAR (*with deep solemnity*). Yes,

We are pilgrims, every one of us, all pilgrims—
And all disguised. There is not a man or woman
But seeks another thing than what is sought for.
All has a purpose. Nothing is itself—
Unless itself be nothing. She too seeks
An end beyond the ending of her song,
More lovely than the warbling in the dusk
When the bird speeds the day upon its quest,
As she goes questing on the spirit's way
Through music's exit. She too is disguised.
Aye, God himself, who heads the pilgrim line,
Is no more honest than the rest of us.
He puts a band of cloud around his head,
And nature's coloured cloths about his limbs.
And when we tear away one or the other
In agony of search, we only find
Another and another disguise beneath
For our frustration. He too is beyond.
Well have these Hindus called the universe
The Play of Brahm. Poor maskers, we are driven
From act to act. And that were happy and well
Had we but wit to hold ourselves no more

Than ripples upon Jamuna. But alas!
We pin our souls unto our masks, and turn
God's play to earnest, setting tragedy
In place of laughter. You think I have come
To listen to a song, perhaps to look
Upon a queen. That is the father-lie
That has begotten this (*indicates disguise*). No,
I have come
To seek an ancient solitary path
All must in season tread, and hereabout
May be a glimpse or entrance.

TANSEN (*with revelation*). Brother, brother!
Why have you hidden yourself from me till now?

MIRA'S VOICE (*singing to stringed music*).

Oh! fresh as music-haunted wind,
Come, thou enchanter of my mind!
Lift up thine ageless infant glance,
And in my heart's cool courtyard dance
The joy that foots the years along
Till all my being break in song.

AKBAR *goes slowly out on the right.*

TANSEN *follows.*

The stringed music continues into the next scene.

II

In front of the Temple. A flight of steps leads up to the interior.

The stringed music continues from the previous scene.

AKBAR AND TANSEN *come in on the left, and seat themselves on the ground to right and left of the steps. They make offerings of rice, coconuts and jasmine blossoms.*

MIRA (*within sings*).

Dance, Holy Child ! My melody
Shall speak the joy of those who see
Heaven's courtyard here on earthly ground,
And hear a music past our sound ;
And know, in every joy and woe
God's onward footsteps dancing go.

The stringed music continues for a short time.

AKBAR *has listened with intensity, and fallen into abstraction.*

TANSEN.

Brother! your eyes are closed.

AKBAR.

Brother! a door
Has opened. In the darkness all disguise
Falls from the soul, and that great liar, sight,
Is silenced. Those who look shall never see
Beyond the eye's horizon. Those who see
Have no more need for looking.

TANSEN.

You speak in riddles.

AKBAR.

Because all things are plain; and that one Truth
Which I have sought through many clamouring
truths

Has grown as simple as a blade of grass.

So much her song has taught me.

TANSEN (*reverently*).

She comes herself.

MIRA *is seen at the top of the steps, still in the ecstasy
of worship. She dances a dance of devotion to
Krishna. At the end of the dance she returns to
normal consciousness and comes slowly down the
steps.*

AKBAR *rises, and as she reaches the bottom step,
prostrates and touches her feet.*

TANSEN *prostrates a little distance away.*

MIRA.

I am unworthy in heart of such obeisance :
Much more unworthy then my wayward feet.

AKBAR (*rising : Tansen also rises*).

Oh! they have led me through a holy song
Unto the vision of the Feet of God.

MIRA.

That is great joy. May he well prosper you
To lift your face up to the Face Divine.
So shall you reach what is beyond the power

Or purchase of earth's kings. An emperor's eyes
Have longed for that in vain.

TANSEN. And must the emperor,
Because he is Akbar and a Mussulman,
Be held for ever from his heart's high wish?

MIRA.
No, No! All paths will find the inner shrine,
Though there be many openers of the gate.
“However men approach me, I welcome them,
For all the paths are mine.” So says the Lord.

TANSEN.
And how shall he attain ?

MIRA. When he shall wield
An unseen sceptre on the throne of nothing.

AKBAR.
Alas! Alas!

MIRA. Your sorrow for another
 Will clear your way.

TANSEN.
In a past life.

My brother was a king

MIRA. We have all been kings and queens
At one time or another. It is a habit
Most hard to break ; for power to human hand
Is its great weakness, wealth its poverty.

TANSEN.
Your Majesty is rumoured through the world
To have escaped both.

After the lips are blue. You draw the world
By wizardry of song, and set a throne
Invisibly established on a strength
Beyond the mightiest prince of all the Rajputs.

MIRA.

I am my husband's most obedient wife.

AKBAR.

And his first rival.

MIRA

His least word is law.

AKBAR.

Your word is source and arbiter of law,
Being creation. You poets are in league
With God. You set His thoughts in beauty's
mould,

Speeding fulfilment of His ancient dream.
You are sworn foe of those whose hearts are set
On building life in their own likeness—kings
And those whose passions king it over them,
Who count the world their sustenance. I have
taken

Out of the far-off echoes of your songs
Great beauty and great wisdom; and now that I
Have looked upon their source, something
within

Would almost dare the peril of plain speech
Where humbly now it strains itself to break
The shackles of impossibility.

You on the surface are a queen, and I—
Am but a beggar.

MIRA. But underneath the surface
We may be different; and deeper still
Be no more different than that great life
That comes and goes, that feeds and sins and
prays,
And is, ah! slowly, slowly, gathered home
By the awakened soul, that like a goatherd
Scans the wide plains under a downward palm
For his hungry flock that wandered while he
slept.

AKBAR.

Ah! how we all are stifled by disguise,
And barter for a name, or pride of race,
The splendid jewel of the spoken heart.
We grasp at gilded vanities, and miss
God's orphaned and outcast simplicities
That cry for home and love. Were I but free
To serve my heart's high purpose, I would set
A crown upon your head, and lay a kingdom
Here at your feet.

MIRA. I have no need of either.

AKBAR.
Oh! truth to you so sweet, to us most bitter,
Choking the stream whereof yourself are spring.
You have no need to *take*, but pity us

Whose hearts cry out *Give! give!*—the little cry
That holds all healing for all human ill,
All sanctuary from self. Permit us then
To leave our gifts, though mean, to bless your
shrine.

MIRA.

Ah! when the heart is pure, and all the mind
Held to one holy end, the meanest gift
Is pleasing to the Lord. Did he not say
A cup of water offered in his name
Had sure acceptance? A handful of sweet
flowers
May breathe a fragrance past a royal boon.

TANSEN *moves towards Mira to offer flowers.*

MIRA *closes her eyes and holds out her hands.*

TANSEN (*putting the flowers in Mira's open hands*).

The flowers of the earth are His. We give His
own.

AKBAR (*bringing from his coat a necklace of jewels
rolled up which he lays on the flowers in Mira's
hands*).

The stones of the earth are His. We give His own.

MIRA *turns towards the inner shrine, elevating her hands
above her bowed head as she offers the gifts.*

AKBAR *signifies silently to Tansen to go. They both go
quickly and silently away, dropping into the attitude
of pilgrims.*

THE TWO CITIZENS *enter from the opposite side and watch Mira.*

MIRA *after a moment's silence lowers the gifts in her hands and looks at them; then exclaims:*

Brothers! a miracle! a miracle!

Devoted Love has changed your humble stones
To glittering stars, a milky way of gems
Across the sky! (*She turns to the front again*).

SECOND CITIZEN. Pardon, O Queen! these gems
Look much too real to be miraculous.

FIRST CITIZEN.

May we have leave to ask whose gift they are?

MIRA.

The givers to the Lord give not for name.
Who gives for name gives only to himself
A gift of nothing.

FIRST CITIZEN. We are well rebuked
For over-boldness. It was the glittering stones
Drew question from us, being worth the wealth
Of a mountain kingdom, hinting that a king
Had passed on pilgrimage—

SECOND CITIZEN. Or if not a king,
Then one who had robbed a king.

MIRA (*bewildered*). Could so much truth
Live on the lips, and yet the heart be dark
Either with falsehood or with violence,

Or does the world's illusion fall upon us?
He spoke of being a king in a past life,
And of disguises and imprisonment
In harsh impossibility—such words
As the dark heart breaks gladly through to light.
And now his words too seem to turn to stones
Richer than beggar's garb but beggar poor
Beside my simple reading of them. Still,
The gift is God's, and He will sanctify
If need be—need be? Who am I to ask
The whence or how? All comes alone from Him,
And all by many ways goes back to Him,
And peace comes only to the open hands
That are but highways for His passing will.
Has not all trouble come upon the world
Through questioning? Are not life's pains and woes
But smittings back of her own faithlessness?
O brothers! we shall never leave the wheel
Of birth and death, and find our liberation,
While that slim prying serpent of the mind
Puffs out his hood, and darts from side to side
Sharp questioning. No! let us take what is
With calmness. Thus the things that are to come,
Finding no strong repulsion or desire,
May err no whit beyond, nay nor beneath,
His purpose; for the thing itself is nought;
Only the heart's intention counts with Him.

She takes the necklace into the temple.

SECOND CITIZEN (*to First Citizen*).

He spoke of being a king in a past life.

FIRST CITIZEN.

It must have been those pilgrims from the north
We talked with hereabout a while ago.

SECOND CITIZEN.

How think you they came by it?

FIRST CITIZEN.

If by true means,

There is mystery about, for it is worth
Uncounted wealth, and those poor worshippers
Are not what they appear. If by false means,
We should bestir ourselves to track it out
Lest some misfortune overtake the queen
If crime should make a silent hiding-place
Out of God's habitation. Come away.

SECOND CITIZEN.

So great a gift could hardly have its equal
Knotted in the same kerchief, think you so?

FIRST CITIZEN.

It may be a ninth wave with followers;
One shout of trouble with an echoing train.
Let's go, for we are on the shaking verge
Of revelation, when thin poverty
Breeds wealth beyond a prince's treasure-house.
They go out.

III

The Darbar Hall of Mewar at Chitorgarh.

KING KUMBHA, QUEEN MIRABAI, and TWO ATTEND-
ANT MINISTERS *come in.*

KUMBHA (*seating himself on a dais*).

Let the two citizens
Be brought into our presence.

(*First Minister goes out*).

Send at once
For the Court Jeweller.

(*Second Minister goes out*).

MIRA (*standing*). There was a time
When no exalted place your presence graced
Was fully furnished lacking one you loved.

KUMBHA (*impatiently*).
My time is brief: what would you?

MIRA. Life after life
Was once too brief for love. I come to ask
Why you have taken from the temple shrine,
With clouded brows and mutterings, the gift
Of gems one gave to God.

KUMBHA. I have taken it
Because I have chosen to take it.

Yet rooted darkly past the common sight
Of blunt and simple eyes. I want plain truth.

MIRA.

And yet you seek it in all mouths but hers
Who in no single thought, no slightest word,
Has erred against her marriage vow, but here
Lays all her life before you for your will,
In full obedience. Something in your mind
Bends its once quiet mirror to rude shapes
That turn life's face to twisted mocking mouths,
Eyes that but see the thing they mean to see,
Ears deaf but to themselves; and round my feet
They leer and mutter. Oh! it is pitiful
When what was fair goes foul, and that straight
mind,
Mate of my softness, turns on its own face
Disfiguring hands, and in the seat of power
Justice now does injustice to itself.
Oh! that is pitiful.

KUMBHA.

I need no pity

Till I have searched about the whispering world
For truth's full substance, not a shadowy phrase.

MIRA.

I have told the truth.

KUMBHA.

And underneath your truth

Lies the clear challenge of a princely gift
Wrapped in such circumstance as holds a threat

I may not pass. A kingdom's treasury
Goes not for nothing. To your shadowy truth
I shall search out the mate. If that be clean
I shall have need for pity.

MIRA. Ah! that *if*
Is dagger-pointed.

KUMBHA. Not for innocence.

MIRA.
Doubt holds its haft.

KUMBHA. But waits the rigid proof.

MIRA.
That dagger *if* wounds first and after strikes.

KUMBHA.
If "after" find occasion.

MIRA. And if not,
Still that sharp hurt must quiver in the heart
And scar forgiveness.

KUMBHA. I must do my duty.

MIRA.
That were sweet medicine if love and love
Set lips to the one draught. But now, for me,
Shut by suspicion from your inmost thought,
It throws chill mockery on the flame of love,
And makes past vows ring hollow. Ah! me, to
have lived
Through love's pure greenness, when the happy
rains

Made life a full glad river; to have lived
Into the dry and shrivelled aftertime! .
That were indeed poor ending to our song—
Were it the end: but past our little reach
I hear invisible compassionate lips
Laugh softly, and in comprehending eyes
Catch a far meaning to the shadow-dance
Of children who have hurt themselves in play,
And shall have sleep, and waken, and forget.

KUMBHA.

My business is with stern and present things,
Not with pale phantoms and vague prophecy.
*(He gives three claps with his hands, on which the
MINISTER and TWO CITIZENS come in).*

No more of words. Leave me; my time is brief.

MIRA. And mine has ages in each hour.

KUMBHA *(finally.)* Go, Go!

MINISTER *observes the tension, and as Mira passes him
on her way out, he bows very low with a glance
of faithfulness. The TWO CITIZENS make pro-
found obeisance to Mirabai and then to King
Kumbha.*

MINISTER.

These are the men, Your Majesty, who spread
The news about the city.

KUMBHA *(caustically).* The news is nothing,
But what hangs on it. Have you word of strangers?

MINISTER.

None but the passage of two Muslim traders
Eastward.

SECOND CITIZEN (*respectfully correcting*).

Most gracious king! the men who brought
The gift of gems were Hindu pilgrims.

KUMBHA (*sarcastically*). So

To *your* keen sight.

MINISTER. I had them closely watched.

KUMBHA.

The pilgrims?

MINISTER. No, the traders.

KUMBHA. So your mind

Runs that way too?

MINISTER. But in the crowded streets
They mixed themselves and vanished clean away.

KUMBHA.

And then?

MINISTER. Their story sprawled about the streets
Much like the spiny cactus that spreads out
From some disordered thought stalk sprung from
stalk

Haphazard. But the roots are in our hands,
The simple first of complicated last.
May they now speak?

KUMBHA *signifies permission*.

FIRST CITIZEN. May it please Your Majesty,
We have no tale but that which speaks itself;
The jewelled gift, and such poor inference
As our unfurnished minds may straighten out
From word to word. We spoke most brotherly
To two poor pilgrims at the temple gate.
One sang a song made by the queen, and spoke
In words one hears only from holy men.

SECOND CITIZEN.

We went our way, and when we came again
Queen Mira stood upon the temple steps
Alone, and rapt in some ecstatic dream,
Holding upon her hands that priceless gift.
A miracle, she thought, had changed the stones
To living jewels.

FIRST CITIZEN. We could not but hold
That such a gift came through no heavenly dream,
But out of human hands, and showed a king
On pilgrimage.

SECOND CITIZEN. Or one who had robbed a king.
KUMBHA.

Where did they come from?

SECOND CITIZEN. From the Mogul country.
KUMBHA.

Ha! and you followed them?

FIRST CITIZEN. We sought them out
Because the queen in soft bewilderment

Counted their words as if to value them,
How one had said the other had been a king
In a past life.

SECOND CITIZEN. From that we knew the gift
Came from the pilgrims, but we sought in vain
To find them.

KUMBHA. Fools! O fools! Half way to wisdom
Is folly's rest-house. There are two sure ways
Of holding back suspicion that a man
Is a wild ass from the hills; one is, to lop
One's ears, fold up one's tail, and make such
sounds
As dullards may applaud for human speech.

FIRST CITIZEN.

We have offended Your Majesty.

KUMBHA. Not of you
I speak, for you are not wild asses. You
Are tame ones. How domestication rusts
The edge of sight and hearing! The other way
Of holding back suspicion, is to bray
That you *are* wild asses. Then no one will believe,
But take your word as masking. These wild asses
Out of the north have taken a middle way.
They have put their hooves in sandals, and have
brayed
Most philosophically. And you bats
Have neither seen nor heard. What is the use

Of being burdened with such eyes and ears
As miss their proper function?

SECOND CITIZEN.

O King! have mercy.

KUMBHA.

I will have mercy. Nature has denied
My merciful hand the power to stretch your ears
To their true length. And since they but abuse
Their human shape, I shall relieve you of them.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Mercy, O King!

FIRST CITIZEN. Or if *you* grant not mercy,
Surely our prayer will put it in the hand
Of the king's minister!

KUMBHA.

Such futile prayer

But shows my wisdom deeper than it seemed,
And you as doubly deaf and more than blind
Who think by prayer to move the hidden will
That mine but shadows. I am God's minister
Linked in unbroken line through mighty kings
With the divine ancestor of my race;
My ministers do my will.

FIRST MINISTER.

Our wills are yours

O King! in all things.

KUMBHA.

All?

FIRST MINISTER.

Your Majesty

Is doubtful?

KUMBHA.

There may come a testing-time.

SECOND MINISTER.

Have we not passed enough of test to seal
Our fealty?

KUMBHA. Life knows nothing of enough.

It is one hunger, with satiety
To hold it from destruction, self-devoured.
One thing that was enough, complete and fixed,
Would break this bubble that but moves to live,
And put it out like a spear-point in the forehead;
One atom of perfection be as grit
In the eye of the sun, and bring upon the world
The final darkness. There is a rotten stone
Built in the arch of each most firm ideal;
A seed of hatred in the heart of love.
It may be, Fate will leave the stone uncrumbled,
The seed unwatered, or may stay the tooth
Of slow corrosion set by faithlessness
On every tested blade; but it is there,
Eternal threat against security
And ancient order, which alone the will
Of God, and God's own minister, myself,
May hold in place by rule so granite firm
It shakes not though the eye of Justice point
Even against the throne to save the throne.

SECOND MINISTER.

Your words, O King! but speak the ancient truth:
A Rajput prince would sooner slay himself
Than bring dishonour on his lineage.

KUMBHA.

Aye, and if thus the law be firmly set
To rid the person, that the house be safe,
Justice at home will be at home abroad,
Nor softer handed if pollution came
By one just less than king.

FIRST CITIZEN.

(*To the other Citizen*) That strikes the Queen.
(*To King Kumbha*) Those are the very words,
Your Majesty,
I gave the pilgrims, now I think of it,
When one made question what the king would do
If Akbar stealthily should see the queen.

KUMBHA.

Ha! Akbar! Now these arid wells yield water.
Your ears shall be forgiven because your mouths
Stumble on truth. Now let me piece it out.
He said he was a king in a past life:
A kingly quibble, an adventuring foot
That tries a crumbling cliff; a secret thing
That may forget, and cries in its own ear
A shrill reminder. He asked what would befall
If Akbar stealthily should see the queen,—
And you all let them slip! O bitter doom!
How near a thing to hostage may have passed
That would have held the Mussulman in leash,
And set my reign upon its rightful seat

Oh! that tree's fall will bring a kingdom's fruit
Into the dust. Now speak.

COURT JEWELLER. Your Majesty,
I have searched out the brethren of my craft
From here to Delhi, till at last I found
Him who had made the necklace.

KUMBHA. Ha! for whom?

COURT JEWELLER.
For Akbar!

KUMBHA (*with suppressed fury*).
Now red judgment is afoot.

The arch stone falls, the seed of hatred breaks;
Only the sword remains! (*He writes*).

MINISTERS. The sword! The sword!

FIRST MINISTER.
We shall avenge this insult to your throne.

SECOND MINISTER.
Aye, with shed blood shall purify pollution.

KUMBHA.
There the true heart goes straightly to my own
Counting no cost.

FIRST MINISTER. Whatever be the cost,
Akbar shall die.

KUMBHA. Akbar! O mighty Gods!
What blindness and what deafness have you
spread

Across the world, that I alone must move
Clear-eyed before your purpose, holding death
Less than dishonour, though it strike my throne?
Why, what has Akbar done but be himself,
Pollution's minister, to hold its test
Against sweet-mouthed pretension; aye, a stone
To ring the silver of the world, and part
God's minting from the false? Leave *him* alone,
And put the bitter edge of condemnation
To that which wrongs its nature, nay, more vile,
Tunes the kite's beak to give the bulbul's note,
And lure the world with mimicry of good
To share its own pollution. O great Gods!
Strengthen my hand to work Thy solemn will
On that which soils Thy kingdom! *She* must die!
This is our will. You are its ministers.

*He sets Queen Mira's death-warrant before
them.*

MINISTERS.

The Queen! The Queen?

COURT JEWELLER. Queen Mira?

KUMBHA. Aye, the Queen,
And quickly.

FIRST MINISTER. May it please Your Majesty—

KUMBHA.

That please is most unpleasing, for it means
Unstable purpose.

FIRST MINISTER. Nay, O King! it means
Most certain purpose. I have never yet
Set witting hand upon a woman save
In courtesy. I am too old to learn
The sharp extremity of kingly wrath
Whose end has louder threat against the throne
Than her "pollution."

KUMBHA. Then you disobey me,
And set a rival on my outraged throne?

FIRST MINISTER.
To serve the king I disobey the king.
Farewell. (*He goes out*).

KUMBHA. Your punishment will follow you.

SECOND MINISTER.
Mine will precede me.

KUMBHA. What! You too will fail me
To rid my throne of this ignoble taint?

SECOND MINISTER.
First I would rid myself of royal favour
And my exalted office, that my tongue
May freely serve my mind, and serving it,
Serve you.

KUMBHA. Your service is to do my will.

SECOND MINISTER.
Aye, and most gladly were my service given
Had I but certainty it was your will
That spoke.

COURT JEWELLER.

It is true

My hand is firm in beauty's fashioning,
But, that it harm not Beauty for its own sake,
The eye must go more deeply than the surface.
For who would quench the sun because a cloud
Threatens the stainless azure of the dawn,
Or dry a river for a passing taint
That it will sing away with cleansing song?
Oh! in this desert pilgrimage of life
Through harshness to some distant kindlier time,
What soul-refreshment have we but the songs
That she has set within our hearts, like wells
Filled from deep springs beneath our heavy clay?
I cannot stop their source.

KUMBHA.

That source is poisoned

And oozes green corruption.

COURT JEWELLER.

Her purity

Would turn corruption to its likeness.

KUMBHA.

Aye,

And leave it still corruption! "Her purity"! ·
Are you so muddy-veined that in your mind
No comprehension gleams of what may hang
On kings disguised, or what may be between
A woman and an emperor's flattery?

COURT JEWELLER.

Ah! now comes hope, when folly takes a tongue
Most sensible, being most human! Jealousy,

O King! has put your world upon its head,
Making good evil, evil good; but that
Will pass in season. It is a changeable spirit,
And full of contradiction, hating most
Where most it loves. Bid me now tear in pieces
Your hot decree; nor heed that fabled power
That none can touch, but priests from hoary books
Let loose upon the world: a mocking god
That is less god than devil; a painted mask
To intimidate the childhood of the world,
And now grown bloody with men's cruel
thoughts,
And sanctified with age.

KUMBHA. O garrulous fool!
Whose words are faggots to her funeral pyre,
Not counters against judgment. Not alone
She draws my kingdom sideways, but has put
Some witchcraft on men's minds, and through
its mists
God's face is pulled awry. O blasphemy,
Take yourself hence.

COURT JEWELLER. I had already gone:
Only my body lags. (*He goes*).

FIRST CITIZEN. We too must go.

KUMBHA.
You! you whom I have housed with my strong
arm,

Fencing you round with safety! Must I plead
Beggary unto beggars? Must I drag
A king's high will down to the market-place,
And slime it over with conspiracy?
You know the common mind; and it must know
How small a thing may flaw the majesty
That keeps a throne unshaken. How much more
Must judgment use extremity when one
Who lived with greatness, fed on it, drank it,
breathed it,
Stoops from her height, and, in her stooping,
trails
A long divinely-fathered lineage
Into pollution? Then what should stay the hand
Even against a queen?

FIRST CITIZEN. Oh! she has touched
Austerity with human love, and made
More broad the way for men unto the feet
Of God.

SECOND CITIZEN.

And she has touched the common life
With saintliness more strong than iron law
Against all violence. Her gentleness
Has joined in peace and brotherhood our hands
That once were murderous with ancient strife.

FIRST CITIZEN.

How can we raise them, then, against herself?
We humbly take our leave. (*They make to go*).

KUMBHA (*bitterly*). Aye, humbly, humbly,
In such deep humbleness as counts for nothing
The will of majesty! Oh! well you have learned
Your lesson. Well you talk of saintliness
That has dethroned its God, made purity
The name for alien taint, and, for completion,
Has left a king his throne, but taken all
That stands for kingship—loyalty, obedience,
And taken it “most humbly.”

SECOND CITIZEN. In all things else
But this, O King! our wills are yours to death.

KUMBHA (*seeing light: thinking aloud*).
In all things else—one thing—just short of that—
And then? Oh! now a firefly streaks the dark
With sudden burning wire, and here and there
Pricks the night's tent with living silver points,
Letting the light that is behind all darkness
Gleam through an instant! She has vowed
obedience
To God, and I to her am God on earth.
What if obedience be to her the grace
Of utmost merit that shall cancel all
Pollution's debt, sweetening the spirit's way
Through death to life? Oh! then, Oh! then, we two
Who were twin strings on life's new zither; we
Who watched the flickering pleiads in a palm

Hang like a bunch of glow-worms; we who
dreamed

What beauty presses close against the eyes,
Sings in the ears, beats on the heart—ah! vain
Because the blood is quick and full of tumult
In love's first flood, and in the aftertime
Runs heavy with life's dull sediment; we two
May feel with mutual hands from life to life,
And meet beyond earth's shadows! (*To the
Citizens*). You have pledged
Your service in all else but one thing. *That*
I set aside. Take this to the queen herself,
That she be both priestess and sacrifice,
And God be satisfied—and man have peace.

He gives the death-warrant to the Second Citizen.

SECOND CITIZEN (*after an instant's doubt*).

Our word is given, O King!

FIRST CITIZEN.

So be it: the Queen

Shall do the thing that's right. Farewell.

(*They go slowly out*).

KUMBHA (*alone*).

Farewell.

Go! and my day go with you. I have come
Into the twilight, when the drunken sun
Has drained the vats of day, and left the world
Clear-edged and hard; and like a widowed rook
I sit on a bare branch and caw at nothing.

IV

A path among trees on the outskirts of the royal demesne. Night : gentle starlight.

MIRABAI *enters, dressed in a rough garment. She glances furtively around, reads a scroll (apparently the warrant), then turns towards the place from whence she came, makes the Hindu salutation, and says.*

The king's wife shall obey her husband.
She turns to proceed on her way, putting her cloak over her head and obscuring her face.

BEGGAR (*approaching on the opposite side*).

Where are you going, mother?

MIRA. I am not a mother.

BEGGAR.

All women are mothers.

MIRA. One or other of us
Is speaking folly.

BEGGAR. There is but one mother
In all the world, and she is every woman
Though she be childless.

MIRA (*handing the Beggar apparently a coin*).

Take this for your wisdom,
For there is kindness in your voice, and that
Is much to the beggared heart, and makes poor
speech

More wise than sages know whose hearts are
dead.

BEGGAR.

Aye, what have we to help us on the road
But words and a little kindness, we who make
The thin companionship of utter need
Whose one fast law is great necessity
And friendliness. Have you had luck today?

MIRA.

I have had the greatest luck in all my life.

BEGGAR.

Where have you come from?

MIRA. We are not the wind

That it should matter where we have come from.
We are immortal flames, and where we go
Is all that matters.

BEGGAR. Where are you going, then?

MIRA.

Where but to holy Brindaban?

BEGGAR. One and all

Go that way in the long run, in this life
Or in some other, but you are the very first
I ever heard of going by this road.

MIRA.

Has not the Lord said all roads lead to Him ?

BEGGAR.

Why, that is true; but I have never yet
Found out a verse that filled one like a meal.
There is a hungry space between the truth
One finds in books, and this hard wrinkled earth
We live by, and shall die by. Your holy phrase
Will serve your feet but poorly for a way
Through stones and sand, cobras and poisonous
thorns.

You cannot reach Brindaban by this road
Alone the world's firm surface, for this way
Leads to no solid end, but to the river.

MIRA.

That should be end enough, and full of sleep
For troubled eyes.

BEGGAR.

Most sure! It is in flood.
Elephants could not ford it. Buffaloes
That butt through life, and turn aside for no one,
Would spin on it like mango leaves. My way
Leads to Brindaban. Come along with me
And I will see you safe.

MIRA.

There is but one way
Unto the inmost shrine, and each alone
Must walk it. This is mine.

She moves towards the river.

BEGGAR (*interposing*).

Then you will miss
The burning-ghat, and bob around the keel

(*She sings*)

Only on my constant prayer
Lord, to Thee, my soul relies,
I who no proud purpose bear,
Nor the burden of the wise.

Me no deep-eyed fastings waste,
Seeking thus a swifter goal;
Only day and night I taste
Quenchless hunger of the soul.

No consoling boast is mine
Won from sacred pilgrimage;
Only to an inner shrine
Go my feet from youth to age.

I shall finish it at Brindaban.

BEGGAR (*impressed*).

For my word

That may be wise or foolish, as the moon
Waxes or wanes, you gave me recompense
Out of your little wealth. But I have nothing,
Even if I had luck as great as yours
And had a queen's song pat upon my tongue,
To pay for wisdom that is wholly wise,
I know not why—and that is why I know.
Oh! you have touched me somewhere with a
wave

Of sanctity.—Here, take your own reward
That is grown richer than a royal gift
Because your hand has made it fabulous

With some strange beauty that is not of earth,
Some heavenly kindness.

(He tries to put the coin in her hand. She tries to prevent him doing so. He catches hold of her hand, then lets it go with a start).

That is no beggar's hand!
That is no outcaste hand! That is a hand
That speaks without a tongue, that princely
dreams
Would flock around! What are you?

MIRA. I am a woman.

BEGGAR.

Who are you?

MIRA. For the first time in my life
Solely and utterly I am myself,
And go on my own solitary way.
She goes off quickly towards the river and is lost in the darkness.

BEGGAR *(mazed, and looking about).*

Surely I dreamed a goddess in beggar's garb
Spoke with me here? And yet this coin is real,
And she must be as real—unless this world
Is mixed of true and false. Why, so it is,
But I have not before seen it so plain—
If I do see it. Some deep mystery
Has passed me with bewilderment.

BEGGAR (*indicating the path to the river*).

She went *that* way.

GUARD.

Ah, good! That way leads only to the river,
And it is in flood. We shall have more than one
True coin to halve when I have handed her
To the king's jailer.

BEGGAR. Give me back my coin.

It was the price of wisdom, my first fee.

GUARD.

And it is likely it will be your last.
You are no whit less wealthy than you came.
What if I now arrest you for trespassing?

BEGGAR.

One or the other fills your hunter's bag,
And she is the better game—if she be flesh
And blood, and not some spectre of the brain.
Take me—you miss her. Take her and my coin,
And you leave loose a tongue that may denounce
You for a thief, and she will bear me witness—
If she be innocent. If not,—well then. . .
What a queer mixture is this world! And you
Halve a dead coin while some poor mortal drowns,
Or a great angel treads the swirling flood,
Or may be a thief slips from you in the dark.

GUARD (*hurrying towards the river*).

Wait till I come again, then you shall have
The coin I hold as hostage for a witness.

BEGGAR.

Speed there and back.

MAID (*coming in hurriedly, dishevelled, carrying a lantern*).

Where is the queen? the queen?

BEGGAR.

I gather many things on my lone way,
But queens are not among them.

MAID. O Hari! Hari!

This is no time for jesting. Where is she?

BEGGAR.

How should I know?

MAID. She must have passed this way.

She has left her chamber. She has put her
robes aside.

I do not know where she is gone—or how—
Or wherefore, but my heart is full of dread.
There are dark rumours that the king is angry.
His ministers have left him with drawn brows,
And there are whisperings and threatening looks.
Oh! it is all so different, so different!
Once she would sing when in her bed-chamber
I readied her for sleep, but not a song
She sang tonight. Her eyes were full of thought.
They looked beyond this world—so calm, so
calm.

And once she sighed and murmured, "The
king's wife
Shall obey her husband,"—and now I cannot
find her,
And I am shaken with fear.

BEGGAR. May God preserve her!

MAID.

Then you know something?

BEGGAR. Maybe I do—or don't;
I cannot tell; but one, shaped liked a woman,
Beggar in dress, but wearing little hands
Such as God makes to hold big destinies,
Went by me with kind words.

MAID. It may be the queen.

BEGGAR.

She was a thief; so says the guard, and he
Is very wise. They are all very wise
These people who know nothing. He has gone
To capture her, but there is that about her
May beat him at his trade. Oh! there's a chain
Falls from her lips in wisdom and sweet sound
Upon the soul, and takes it prisoner
Out of that little darkened room of sense
That men call freedom.

MAID. Oh! it is the queen,
And you are calm, and talk, when we should
cry

For some calamity that gathers fast
About us in the darkness! Where is she?

BEGGAR.

Gone to Brindaban.

MAID. That was her last song.

Which way?

BEGGAR *indicates the path to the river.*

MAID. Alas! the river is in flood

And she will surely perish!

GUARD (*coming back*). Pah! I missed her,

But the rogue's destiny took her by the hair.

MAID *breaks into sobs.*

GUARD.

Why, what's the matter—crying?

MAID. Where is the queen?

GUARD.

The queen! That is a question you should answer

Better than I. I have enough to do

To keep these beggars off the royal paths.

This one I lock up safely. The other one

Will trouble us no more.

MAID. Merciful heaven!

BEGGAR.

What have you done to her?

GUARD. Nothing. It was she

Did all the doing. I caught up on her

Just as she reached the river side. I called,
"Stop in the king's name!" She called back at
me,
"In the king's name I go on!" I made a snatch
And caught her dress; then she, to wrench her
free,
Took both her hands, and dropped this piece of
paper.
Then in the flood she sprang, and with spread
arms
Floated away in moonlight.

BEGGAR.

O blind fool!

Seeing with outer eye the thing unseen,
But with the inner, dark. Had you but known
The face of heaven as comradely as we
Who have no roof to shut us in from God,
Then you had known the dark half of the moon
Is turned to us.

GUARD.

That's truth, there is no moon!

And yet I could have sworn she swam in moon-
light.

And, now I measure out the eye's first look,
It was less moonlight than outspreading wings
That moved with her, and she was like a lotus
That slips away from muddy anchorage.
What can this mean? Are we all dream-ridden,
Or is it something we had thought was far
Comes very near? What's wrong?

MAID. Read us the paper!

GUARD. .
Read it yourself.

MAID. I cannot.

BEGGAR. Her eyes are wet.

GUARD.
How do you know they are wet?

BEGGAR. I do not know
How I know anything, but mine are dry
With some great sorrow that has more sweet-
ness in it
Than vina-strings or dances, or the food
That rich men scatter at a festival.

GUARD.
Will you be plain, what's wrong?

MAID. The queen is drowned.
You might have saved her.

GUARD. God! was *she* the queen!

BEGGAR.
Give me the paper.
*Guard gives it to him: he tears it in pieces which
he scatters.*

GUARD. You have not read it!

BEGGAR. No,
I am not skilled in letters. But I have learned
That when a king's wife says again with sighs
Her vow of life-obedience, when a queen

THE HOUND OF ULADH

PREFACE TO "THE HOUND OF ULADH"¹

I

"THE Hound of Uladh" is based on two tales ("The Feast of Bricriu" and "The Exile of the Sons of Doel Dermait") in that phase of the ancient Celtic mythology of which the demi-God, Cuchulain, is the central figure. The whole mythology, as it developed on the Irish terrain in the Gaelic language (the Irish and Scottish variants of the Celtic speech), passed through two phases of deflection from its original trend; a tenth-century phase of adaptation of collected and recorded stories to Christian ideas and chronology; and a nineteenth-century phase of rationalization according to the theory that the myths were primitive reactions to nothing beyond the phenomena of nature and are chiefly valuable today for the manners and customs that they disclose.

A third phase was reached, comparable to that pointed out by Walter Pater regarding the Greek myth of Demeter, when it passed into "the ethical stage, in which the persons and the incidents of the poetical narrative are realized as abstract symbols . . . of moral or spiritual conditions." This third phase of mythological interpretation opened with the present century, when a new scientific outlook on the physical side reversed the materialistic concept of the universe and human life, and on the psychological side changed the term "primitive" from a merely chronological indication to the expression of a quality recognizable at any period of cultural history.

The Celtic mythology came within the ken of the new psychology. Sir John Rhys, with an imagination that could

¹ Uladh, pron. oo'la, Ulster.

see through the externals of his ancestral lore, and lay on its essentials an order that was native to it, gave to the Celtic mythos the status of a religion in his Hibbert Lectures on "Celtic Heathendom." Professor H. D'Arbois De Jubainville, with the logic of the French mind, saw that the old Celtic myth-stories of France and the British Isles passed beyond logic into the region of creative imagination and the intuition. There were other writers on the mythology, but the two mentioned are among the most significant.

The emergence of AE, at the time spoken of, as a poet who had a challenging view of the psychological contents of the myths, gave young writers of the incipient Irish revival in poetry and drama a keen sensitiveness to deeper implications than the externals of the ancient stories. Many years afterwards, in the dedication of his great mythological poem, "The House of the Titans," he repeated the interpretative principle with which those of us who surrounded him in the early days of the renaissance were familiar:

. . . These myths were born
Out of the spirit of man, and drew their meaning
From that unplumbed profundity. I think
In after ages they will speak to us
With deeper voices and meanings. . . .

Shelley had preceded AE in the enunciation of a progressive interpretation of poetry; and the new sense of significances in the myths found ratification in expressions in the old tales such as the saying that an apple-tree and a yew-tree in certain poems were "not understood by unlearned people," and that a fountain in a myth-region with five streams flowing from it "is the fountain of knowledge, and the streams are the five senses through which knowledge is

obtained." To catch the inner import of the myths became the absorbing pursuit of my own mind : to tell it as truly and musically as I could became the central purpose of the creator within me.

The digressions of life carried me away from the traditional habitat of the Celtic mythos. But I had the illuminating experience, in my wanderings between myth-haunted Japan and the pueblos of the American "Indian," of finding the persons of the myths change their names and places and costumes, and alter hardly a whit their essential significances. Pegasus of Helicon came, I saw, from the same mythical stables as Cuchulain's pair of horses and the seven of Surya of India; and they and their drivers became as imaginatively substantial to me as the Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

In my early reading of translations of myths from the old Gaelic language, I had conceived the idea that the stories round the Red Branch hero Cuchulain were not casual and unrelated, but that in them the Celtic genius had been engaged in a process of creative imagination that would have reached the culmination of the myth-making faculty in the evolution of a figure belonging to the mythological order of "saviour heroes" (as distinct from "culture heroes") had not the process been cut across by the Christian and Norman invasions. I had wished at times that someone would arise with the vision and discipline and poetical ability to make the artistic completion. The ancient Celtic religion, that had prevailed for centuries in western Europe and the islands, had passed as an institution. AE's youthful propaganda for the restoration of the worship of the old Irish Gods had been as ineffective as a movement for the return of the Olympian deities to Greece would have been, or for the reversion of

any of the religions prevailing at the opening of the twentieth century to the simplicity of their origins. But I held the conviction that the realities which the old Celtic deities symbolized were eternally valid both in the constants of universal life and in the flux of human concepts of that life from religion to religion and era to era.

II

Early in 1932 a thirty-year-old and occasionally repeated desire to make the Bardic tale of "The Exile of the Sons of Doel Dermait" the basis of a poetical work returned to me with insistent vividness. Its central triad, the Three Sons, linked my imagination with parallel expression of trinitarian ideas in other cultures; and the Englishing of Doel Dermait as "The Beetle of Forgetfulness" carried me away in droning circles and spirals to the ancient scarabeus of Egypt with its symbolism of the evolving human soul. Contacts in the United States of America between 1929 and 1932 with poets and actors of my early Dublin days who had become eminent in their arts beyond Ireland, and lectures in universities and other institutions on the poets and dramatists of the revival, had stimulated the Irishry in me. And by the time I was settled on Capri Island in the autumn of 1932 (with unfulfilled intent to spend an entirely literary year between America and India) the spell of the mythos was upon me; and the country in which my imagination found its home was not an Italian island where the Bacchic tradition still lingered in the time of the gathering of grapes, but Tir na n-Og, the Celtic land of the immortals.

Thenceforward the story of the Three Sons was never long from my mind; and by 1934 my proposed re-telling of

the tale had taken shape in my imagination as a dramatic fantasy with lyrical prologue and epilogue. The older Bardic tale of "Bricriu's Feast," of which "The Exile. . ." was a mythological sequel, became an essential opening, and fell into a monologue by Bricriu explaining the origins of the story and his own part in it to an audience of the early twentieth century, as though he had come out of the mythological past bringing with him the environment of his time and a censorious capacity that had provoked his nickname of Bitter-tongue.

Such a telescoping of past and present had become integral in the psychology of my rendering of the old stories, not merely as a "literary idea" but as what I perceived to be a law of life, a stable centre from which radiated and round which revolved the interdependent and graded activities and progressions of life. In "The Hound of Uladh" I have taken simultaneousness for granted in certain of its sections: in the scenes of "A City of Dreams" (Dublin 1911) set between the scenes of "The Island of Captivity" (any time B. C.). The discovery of simultaneousness by Cuchulain, when he realized the implication of his food having remained untasted (as though the apparently long and far quest from which he had returned had filled the abyss of time between one breath and the next), I have taken as the moment of the ecstatic opening of his eyes to what I conceive to be the major Mystery of life—the Mystery of fixity in motion, of the eternal within the temporal.

The development of my retelling of the stories caused certain omissions and extensions; but of these only the student of the mythology will be aware. I may, however, refer to the second part, "The Fascination of Findchoem." The meeting between the daughter of King Eochu Rond and

Cuchulain, though relatively casual in the story of "The Exile . . ." is, in fact, crucial; for the meeting brought Cuchulain to the deed that drew upon him the *geasa* (compulsion) of the quest to find why the Sons of Doel Dermait had left their native land. In the condensation of the story from the old Gaelic, by Dr. Richard Irvine Best of the National Library, Dublin, which was the preliminary scenario of my telling, Findchoem is referred to as "the cause of it all." My creative imagination was not satisfied with a passing reference to so essential a personage to the story, and flooded my mind with ideas and feelings from which developed a conception of Findchoem consistent with the inferences of character and circumstances of her briefly indicated part in the story, in which she emerges as a pioneer of womanhood, a worthy comrade of Maeve of Cruachan who was as potent a queen as any man was king, and of Dechtere the mother of Cuchulain, who was the charioteer of her brother, King Conchubar of Uladh.

III

The creative and interpretative poets, as I understand them, respond primarily and intimately to the flux of things, and regard its records as deltaic deposits carried and laid down by the flow of life. Textually, myth and scripture fall out of date and mode, an inevitable process that occasions much confusion in minds and emotions that are attached to the "fixations" of life when the piles and arches of form are subjected to new floodings of the river of being. But no such worry in the modification and accommodation of expressed truth visits the poet who finds under the veilings of era and location and language the everlasting verities that these

conceal from eyes that see not, and confess to ears that hear. Regarded thus, myth and scripture are eternally contemporaneous; as old, as young, and as prophetic as rhythm in human life and growth in nature. The creative and interpretative poets (as yet a small band of "God's fools" who translate their divine folly into song) know that while one of their greatest elevated them to the ungazetted office of "legislators of the world," the elevation stopped short of its finial; for if poetry became the source and sustenance of the super-physical life, the office of legislation in the external affairs of humanity would have to close for want of clients and occasions. The essence of "the law and the prophets" (which is the poetry of action controlled and directed by vision), would have been transmuted into the heart and mind of humanity, and thence into a spontaneous idealism embodying in personal and collective life, not inadequate mental concepts or fluctuant emotions, but the characteristics of unity, community, balance, rhythm, form, feeling, thought and illumination which are native to poetry of the authentic legislative order.

Matthew Arnold in "Essays in Criticism" declared his belief that mankind would more and more "discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us." I am convinced that when poetry attains an interpretation which mentally is a transparency over the countenance of reality, and emotionally is rid of all taint and distortion from the debasing and enslaving elements in life, the debilitation of human nature that cries for consolation and sustainment will have been eliminated. The imaginative interpretation of life, which is the office of myth old or new, being free of the preconceptions and misconceptions that darken and deafen and deaden the thought and feeling of

humanity at the prose-level of so-called facts, offers the possibility of an intimate approach to reality with an attendant assurance and peace that are beyond the deludable mind and perturbable heart.

IV

The Celtic religion, out of which the myths arose and on which "The Hound of Uladh" is based, may here be appropriately summarised for the informing of those to whom it is unknown. Its Gods and Goddesses embodied principles and powers that preceded the creation of the world, though their emergence followed it. These deities were not creative beings to whom intercession was logical. Behind them, out of reach of human intimidation, was the nameless Power from which the universe came forth as what Jubainville calls "a spontaneous or miraculous phenomenon." The God of the Dead (or rather of the Other-world) was the ancestor of the human race. From the Other-world (*Tir-n-Aill*) humanity came; and to it they return after what is called death on this planet. It was also referred to as the Land of the Living (*Tire Beo*). A few highly developed individuals had the capacity of entering that world while still in the earth-body: a few also were able to reincarnate from it into earth-life.

A modified dualistic conception of manifested life, human and superhuman, underlay the Celtic religion as remembered in the myths. It saw a primary originating principle, Darkness (also death and evil), and a secondary derived principle, Light (also life and good). These principles interacted antagonistically and cooperatively in the successive races that, according to myth, populated Eire in the beginning

of things; the Tuatha De Danann, deities of Light, and the Fomorians, deities of Darkness: they also interacted in the personages of the myths in enmities, intermarriages and dual parentage. This ancient recognition of the cooperative antagonism that runs through all life from its highest to its lowest forms is typified in The Hound of Uladh (Cuchulain) and his double parentage from the Sun-God Lugh and the earthly prince Sualtam.

A full exposition of the Celtic religion awaits the advent of a linguist and historian of illuminated imagination. The retirement of the De Danann deities on their defeat by the Milesians is a crucial event, historically or imaginatively, and the latter is much more important than the former. It is variously dated between 1100 and 1700 B.C., but may conceivably be dated today when the things of the spirit are being overthrown by numbers and armaments, as were the De Dananns by the Milesians. The latter are said to have come from Spain; but Jubainville regards this as a monkish distortion of the Land of the Living. A change of philosophical content, similar to the change from Brahminism to Buddhism in India five centuries B.C., may be behind the mythical victory of the Milesians, which, at the moment of its attainment, a Bard celebrated in a chant of the "divine science" that, "penetrating the secrets of nature; and mastering her hidden forces, was, according to the tenets of Celtic philosophy, a being identical with these forces themselves, with the visible and the material world; and to possess this science was to possess nature in her entirety" (Jubainville). Thus a realistic pantheism appears to have succeeded the De Danann deism. To this concept of the learned appears to have been added a popular worship of objects of nature—rivers, mountains and others. But the worship of the De

Danann divinities survived the philosophical change, and remained until Druidism was superseded by Christianity in Ireland in the fourth century. The Druids, of whom much can be learned from Julius Caesar and others, were called by Pliny "the magi of the Gauls and Britons." Their title covered not only the Druids proper, a priestly and learned order, but also the Brehons (law-makers) and the Filé (poet-historians).

V

I have given the best days and nights of the seventh decade of this life (1932-1942) to bringing together, in this mythological fantasy, Celtic myth and English poetry, under the insistence of a vision that had to fulfil itself in utterance, though a lifetime lay between its burgeoning among "the fair hills of holy Ireland" and its flowering and fruiting on and between the equally fair hills of a not less holy India.

REFERENCES

THE CELTIC PANTHEON

TUATHA DE DANANN. The Tuatha De Danann (people of the Goddess Dana), according to the primitive belief, came to Eire from the Land of the Living, and overcame the forces of Darkness. They were themselves overcome in an invasion by the Milesians, who also came from the Celtic Otherworld. The De Dananns were deities of Light. They and their rivals are referred to as people of the Sidhe (pron. shee), supernatural beings.

DANA, also called Brigit, was daughter of Dagda (see below), and wife of Bress, one of the three aspects of the God of the Dead. Though not maritally related, Dagda and Dana are referred to as Father and Mother of the Gods.

DAGDA (the Good God, also called the All-Father) was the head of the Celtic Pantheon; "theoretically the supreme God, but Lugh . . . appears to hold a more important place in Celtic mythology . . ." probably because he belonged to the more obvious aspect of life as the Solar deity. Dagda played on his magical Harp the three tunes of laughter, lamentation and sleep: he was therefore concerned with consciousness and the inner life.

LUGH was son of Dagda (or Cuan) and Ethniu, daughter of Balor, the God of Night. Lugh, the Sun-God, was thus grandson of the Night-God, in conformity with the Celtic idea that Night preceded Day. In the old Celtic social system great chiefs were fostered away from their homes. Lugh was fostered by Taltiu, wife of King Eochu the Proud who first gave law to Eire. She was the daughter of Magmor of the dark divinities. In a crisis

between the deities of Night and Day, Lugh took the side of the forces of Light, and in battle killed his grandfather, Balor. On the death of his foster-mother, Lugh instituted an annual festival in her memory, from mid-July to mid-August when the sun is in its exaltation. His father, Dagda, assigned him a place in the subterranean palace of the Gods near the sacred river Boyne, thus linking him with both sky and earth. Lugh was, like Apollo, regarded as Master of many arts, and became the patron deity of artists and craftsmen. Centres of worship of Lugh have been identified as London and Lyons, both names going back to Celtic originals meaning the fortified dwelling of Lugh.

AENGUS, the Celtic God of Love, was son of Dagda and Boann, Goddess of the River Boyne.

OGMA ("sun-faced," "the divine champion") was represented in statues in Celtic Europe as drawing listeners after him by chains from his tongue that symbolized eloquence.

MIDIR, ETAIN; king of fairyland and his wife. Etain was separated from Midir by Druid enchantments, and for a time was the wife of Aengus. She was similarly separated from Aengus, and born on earth as daughter to an Ulster chieftain. She became wife of a High King (*Ard Righ*), from whom she was won back by Midir as forfeit of a game of chess. They visited the fairy-mound at Cruachan in Connacht. See "Etain the Beloved" in "Collected Poems" by James H. Cousins, (*Kalakshetra*).

MACHA, War-Goddess, for an insult done to her, cursed the Ultonians with periodical indisposition.

FOMORIANS: "Gods of ignorance, as of death and night," overcome by the Tuatha De Danann. Yet between them there were cooperative interactions, as indicated

above, based on apprehension of the fact that the light and dark elements of cosmic and human life are interdependent aspects of a state that includes both.

BALOR, BRESS, TETHRA: triple names of the Chief of the Fomorians, the God of Night, Darkness, Ignorance, Death. The Sword of Tethra, a mythological weapon of the dark Powers, "related all the deeds that had been done by it; for it was the custom of swords in those days to speak."

THE RED BRANCH

THE ORDER OF THE RED BRANCH (*Craobh Ruadh*) was founded, according to tradition, shortly before the time of Christ, by Conchubar, King of Uladh (Ulster). By the middle of the third century it had been destroyed by rivals, and only a tradition in song and story remained through the exploits of its most famous figure Cuchulain.

CUCHULAIN was son of Sualtam, an Ulster prince, and of the Sun-God, Lugh. His mother was Dechtere, sister and charioteer of King Conchubar. His birth was preceded by the appearance of a flock of mysterious birds. In his childhood Cuchulain, in self-protection, killed the watchdog of the Danann smith, Culain. As compensation he elected to do the duty of the dog, and was called the Hound (*Cu*) of Culain. The name was extended to Hound of Uladh as protector of his native province. He became by his deeds, which constitute a semi-divine cycle of stories in the mythology, the chief heroic figure in the Celtic imagination. At crises his celestial father, Lugh, interposed on his behalf. His part in the epic of the "Cattle-spoil of Cooley" (*Tain Bo Cuailgne*) is that

of the supreme hero in defence of his kindred. But a more esoteric aspect of him is expressed in "The Exile of the Sons of Doel Dermait" in which he becomes the type of the "saviour-hero." This is the basis of the present retelling. His wife, Emer, is typical of all womanly virtue in the circumstances of the time. Findchoem is a conception of spiritual, not earthly, affinity.

LAEG was the friend and charioteer of Cuchulain. He drove the famous horses, Black Sanglain and the Grey of Macha, that Cuchulain had won by heroic struggle. "Cuchulain and his charioteer—one might say his chariot and horses which the mode of warfare of the primitive Celts associated so inseparably with them—have something superhuman about them, and are in many respects exempt from the general laws to which the rest of nature is subject." Jubainville does not indicate that the creative imagination that produced the myths may have touched the fact that the son of the Sun-God might have the horses of Darkness and Light to carry him to his combats.

LUGAIDH "of the Red Stripes" was so called from an imaginative response to the triplicity in the universe which assigned him three fathers whose areas of influence (head, upper body, lower body) were indicated by two red stripes, one round the neck, the other round the waist. He was elected Ard Righ of Eiré, and was followed in this office by his son. But something more profound than chronology is involved in the story. For not only is he the son of three fathers, but his mother is sister of his fathers, and becomes his wife. Jubainville remarks that the story is "one of those that have given the ancient Irish a certain reputation for immorality."

Ard Righ : High King, over provincial Kings.

On the human side there is no more evidence for "immorality" in the Celts than there is for the allegation that they practised human sacrifice. Mythologically, no more immorality is involved in the ancestry and relations of Lugaidh than there is in the Christian-mystical concept of mother-wife-daughter in one person. Such ideas have inevitably to be expressed in figurative terms of human relationships.

BRICRIU-BITTER-TONGUE, a member of the Red Branch, but of unheroic reputation; so nicknamed because of his habit of raising quarrels between members of the Order and others. He explains his hidden purpose in the retelling.

OTHER REFERENCES

DOEL DERMAIT, "the Beetle of Forgetfulness": an ancient shadowy king whose three sons disappeared from their native land. Their discovery and release from captivity by Cuchulain are the external theme of "The Hound of Uladh." They and other triplicities in the Celtic mythology are imaginative affinities of the Trinities of other religions and philosophies. Fantasy, if nothing else, may put them alongside the Vedantic Jivatma in incarnation, the triple soul that comes from the Over-soul (*atman*), and whose liberation from the bondages of the external life is the only story on Dagda's Harp.

EOCHU ROND, King of the Hymani, in Connacht; so called (*rond*) from a gold chain he wore in his hair. On being humiliated by Cuchulain by magical means, Eochu put on Cuchulain the *geasa* (inadequately translated as "curse") of finding why the Three Sons of Doel Dermait went into exile.

FINDCHOEM; daughter of Eochu Rond : through her love for Cuchulain became the agent of destiny in drawing on him her father's *geasa*. See reference to her in the Preface.

MAEVE; Queen of Cruachan in Connacht: a warrior princess who led her army in the *Tain Bo Cuailgne*. She became credited in the folk-mind with extended physical and psychical powers, and is regarded as the prototype of Queen Mab. Her husband was King Ailell.

EOCHU GLAS (*glas*, green); the giant jailer of the Three Sons and others on the Island of Captivity. His rival was COIRPRE CUNDAEL, another giant; figurative of the dualism in life, with spirit and matter opposed. Liberation being achieved by Cuchulain's destruction of Eochu Glas, Cuchulain reached the rank of saviour-hero, and the question as to why the Three Sons went into exile did not arise. "I am too busy," a Christian reformer said, "trying to get sin out of the world, to trouble about how it got in."

CORMAC MAC ART; a High King of Eiré endowed with spiritual curiosity.

BRAN MAC FEBAL; a legendary voyager to the Isles of the Blest, the Irish heavenworld; probably historical, and an ancient predecessor of Christopher Columbus.

FIND MAC CUMAILL: chief figure in a legend-cycle that followed the Cuchulain cycle: leader of a national army: heroic exploits and supernatural happenings were attributed to him, also reincarnation in a subsequent era: he became a popular figure later under the name Phil M'Cool.

W. B. YEATS was born in 1865 and AE in 1867, and were at the height of their powers as poets at the date of "A City of Dreams," 1911. As a scholar of religion and philosophy, with an interpretative instead of an

authoritative view and certain super-physical experiences, AE became famous for his expositions in conversation and writing.

The agitation for WOMAN SUFFRAGE reached Ireland when a HOME RULE Bill was proposed that had no reference to women. Leaders of the movement, among others, were Mrs. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins. The journalism of the movement was in the hands of Frank Sheehy Skeffington and James H. Cousins. Hence a pamphlet by the opposition warning the public to "Beware of the Skeffys and their northern Cousins." The "BOYNE" refers to the Battle of the Boyne (1690) between a deposed Catholic King of Great Britain and Ireland and an imported Protestant King from Holland. Annual and sporadic religious and political celebrations round "the Boyne" and "Home Rule" kept the populations in rival camps.

"A CITY OF DREAMS" is outside the mythology, but indicates its influence at the time of the play.

EIRE was one of three mythical queens after whom the island was named in ancient times. The name Eiré remained longest. It was superseded by the name Ir-land from a leader of a legendary invasion. Eiré was reverted to recently instead of Irish Free State.

PROLOGUE: BRICRIU'S FEAST

A stage-front with a dark curtain, probably in the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, where many of the earliest plays of the Irish literary and dramatic revival were produced.

A figure enters, dressed in the traditional garb of the Red Branch warriors, but with an unheroic stoop and a laugh that might be thought sinister were it not that it has something medicinal in it.

As he crosses the stage he makes gestures indicating a mischievous idea—something brought together, then scattered, and brought together again after many events.

As he reaches the centre of the curtain he laughs heartily at his idea; then sees a number of people sitting in front of him; is somewhat surprised, a little bewildered in fact; but pulls himself together, and, as if coming out of a dream into reality (or perhaps out of reality into a dream), says:

My name is Bricriu-bitter-tongue.

I won that piece of praise when young,

Because, in childhood's witless way,

I said what elders could not say;

And smiled when reddened eyeballs rolled

Resentfully at tales I told—
No, not because my tale was true,
And light at dark its challenge threw;
But that my shining arrow laughed
Across the wincing eyes of craft,
And, ruthlessly as sunlight, found
Some shame I knew not. Give a hound
An ugly name, it sticks, they say;
And mine has stuck down to this day,
Though all shall know me in the end
The ultimate heart-easing friend
Whose seeming-bitter laugh and word
Have hidden sweetness, like the curd,
And wash bone-clean, for all to see,
The structure of reality.

I have ignored the touch of time,
Because my feet have learned to climb
A clouded hill where time is done,
Above the rounds of moon and sun;
Where only can the soul escape
Vicissitudes of time and shape.
Many a song of me is sung
In stories that are always young
Through the deep life they draw from me,
The soul's world-troubling shanachie,
Who would awaken from the sod

Shanachie, a story-teller.

The dark, discrowned and grovelling god,
By mixing through his earthly schemes
The agony of heavenly dreams.

(He slightly opens the curtains)

Here now, my mummer's kit unpacked,
I shall a story re-enact,
So near the heart of vision cast
Who knows if now, or ages past,
It is, or has been, near, or far
Under a yet unkindled star?—
For tales whose purport is untold
Are never new, and never old.

*(He makes a sign at which the curtain splits and
moves to the sides, disclosing a wall with a balcony
overlooking a hall which is in darkness).*

Hard by the swirled salt-savoured race
That washes weed and carapace
Edging Loch Rory's rushing tide
(Or by a water only spied
When thought's dense cloud is off the mind,
And Dagda's voice is on the wind),
I spread once more a royal mess
For Conchubar the son of Ness,
The King of Uladh, and the twelve
Whose hands reach always for the helve;
Those braggart babes whose wisdom knows

Loch Rory, now Strangford Lough, County Down.

No argument but deadly blows
That crowd the cloudy human coasts .
With hungry uncompleted ghosts
Who pass along from age to age
Infection of frustrated rage.
*(The hall beyond is lighted, and above a door is
painted a blood-red branch of a tree).*
Behold, behind this dream-thin wall,
My new-created feasting-hall.
Mark you above its lintel spread
A symbol-branch of veinous red—
Ah! not the blossom silver-white
That put enchantment on the sight
And hearing of sea-travelled Bran,
Till round his heavy slumber ran
A dream of a celestial shore,
Whereto he pulled his eager oar.
Ah! not the stem with apples hung
Whose golden music, slowly rung
In ears of Cormac son of Art,
Made him with wife and children part,
Paying the price whereby to gain
The branch whose ringing cancels pain
Because its chime can only bless
The heart's disinterestedness.
Not these, through which clear wisdom calls,
But that from whose dank leafage falls
Unfruitful strife's unfructuous shower,

The blood-red heraldry of power.

(A curtain is drawn disclosing the heroes of the Red Branch gathered at the feasting-table, the shields and weapons of each near at hand).

Set round my ready table see
The proud Ultonian chivalry,
In broidered mantle, pleated kilt,
Loud-laughing, but with hand on hilt—
Brave babes whose eyes are stuffed with sleep
When Macha's Curse begins to creep
Across the land, and rots their pith—
(Cuchulain enters and goes to his seat near the head of the table)

All, save the Watchdog of the Smith,
Whose deeds far poets will recall
As sequel to this festival.
For he will break through fancy's veil
Beyond the telling of this tale,
Into a deeper tale whose scroll
Bears the rich saga of the soul.

Backed is each knight by torch-lit shield
Dented on many a boasted field.
Racked, stacked, at arm's-reach, spear and sword
Laugh at pretence of fear ignored.
Think not, though sounds of conflict cease,

Ultonian, of Uladh (Ulster).

The heroes link their hands in peace.
Their silence is the jealous mood
Of beasts anticipant of food.

If this indictment you deny,
Mark you their answer to my cry
That could the brain's pulsation sway,
But these will read the muscled way.
(*He puts his hands to the sides of his mouth and calls*):

“Who will the champion's portion claim,
And hang aloft his hero-name?”

Hear now their answer this way flung.
(*There is alarm among the warriors. One calls*):

“Ha! there speaks Bricriu-bitter-tongue!”
Triumphant fools! their mouths confess
The taste of their own bitterness,
While those who walk on quiet feet,
Sweet-blooded, find all tastings sweet.

In rattling haste the shield is clasped.
Seized steel on resting steel is rasped.
Fierce fates with dire words are enwound,
(*A commanding note is heard as King Conchubar strikes the roof-beam with the silence rod*)
Till, hark! a sudden silver sound
The hall with audible moonlight fills,
And the heroic hubbub stills.

Such call to silence none may jar
Save the great voice of Conchubar
That I should mark, did I not own
Allegiance to an older throne
Whose strong unwithering roots are curled
Round the foundations of the world.
Now speaks the King:

“O Bitter-tongue

O venomed speech! why have you stung
With hint of strife, that should have ceased,
The happy promise of your feast?
What malice barbs your biting tooth?”

Sire, the maliciousness of truth!

*(During the following the alarm subsides as the
servers pass food around the table; and Bricriu
continues his monologue to those in front of him)*

And that plain answer is enough,
Being the hard-grained oaken stuff,
Stripped of soft foliage and bark
That make concession to the dark
By shutting out from jaundiced sight
The frank and purifying light.
Let their stained conscience give to me
Its own self-guilty soubriquet;
Let stand the chants of Bricriu's fights
A jest among the Red Branch knights;
I am content to be the sleuth
Nose-down upon the track of truth,

Disastrous laughter to devise
For solemn hierarchies of lies,
And gnawing towards its tottering hour
The roof-tree of Fomorian power,
Out of whose ruin shall arise
The peaceful realm of Man grown wise.
My tongue has never learned the trick
Of unsubstantial rhetoric,
Around reality to throw
Spider-pretence. I only know
That he whose heart heroic stands
Scorns the crude valour of the hands;
And, when old wrongs demand redress
From sceptred power's imperiousness,
Flaunts not in eyes that strongly feel
The senseless argument of steel.
So much I know—yet know that each
Hears but his heart's familiar speech
When life by keen desire is stirred.
Hid in the oak a brooding bird
Answers across the singing lands
The one sure voice she understands;
As these will answer when again
I set the test of Gods to men,
And strip to gaze of sun and star
Not what they seem, but what they are.
(*He calls as before*):

“He that would eat a hero’s food
Must first his hero-name make good.”
Look you! the agile blood is up;
Forgotten platter now and cup.
A deeper frenzy fires the brain
To slay, than to devour things slain.
Lightly they barter board and spense
For truculent magnificence;
Which thing the thankful Gods acclaim
As far-off kinship with the Flame,
‘Counting the ardours of affray
A step beyond the lusts of clay,
A step towards radiance reachable
Through many a heaven and many a hell
In charmed and enchanted tale
By God-eyed *filé* of the Gael
Who shall to inner ears unfold
A story never new or old.

Well might one think, from swirling stoor,
Each hurried to a paramour.
Ah no! that blood-bewildering stress
Has yet a touch of tenderness,
Some dream around a burdened face
Soft with solicitude of race.
But this self-animated, dense
Perversion of omnipotence;

filé (fee’lay), poets.

This power that makes, by demon-craft,
Of living branch a deadly shaft;
Would set, untroubled by the soul,
Its fragment-will against the Whole.

Now swing their kilts in the wild dance
Of agitated arrogance.
Now shall the heart of Ireland hear
The thunder of the charioteer;
The hissing of the night-wind's whips
Repeated on his puckered lips;
And in the trees a dusty blast
From brazen wheels—a wind that passed
And ruffled their up-standing lines,
And swung their tops in mad designs.

Look you! respondent to my goad
Some straightly take the westward road,
To mix with stars their hoof-shot turf.
They by the loud Atlantic surf
Shall halt where night on snoring shores
Oozes globed sweat from stellar pores,
And on the morrow prove their breed
By dazzling or disastrous deed.
And some, less travel-set, will breathe
The hay-sweet air of royal Meath,
But tanged with reek of mingled blood

When crash and snap and curse and thud
Count out a life gone vainly by
For the defection of an eye
A hair's-breadth from the hissing path
Of a more cunning weapon's wrath.

Aha! there goes now Uladh's Hound!
Heading for Connacht! testy ground
That will put songs on poet-staves
Full of hard blows and sudden graves.
' (*The noise of the departure of the warriors dies away*)
For he will come on Eochu Rond,
And that wise fool will force a bond
To find what freak made Dermait's sons
Leave their own land. For thus it runs
In stories one can only hear
Aright when knowledge cancels fear;
And battle-axe and spear and knife
Are symbols of the spirit's strife;
Ancestral tales that must be sung
Free from all bitterness of tongue,
Because their utterings disguise
The wisdom of the heavenly wise,
As does the tale I garb in speech
Now that the rout is out of reach,
And birth and life and death fulfil
The fiat of the ancient Will.

(He comes forward. The feast-hall darkens. The front curtain closes across, and he continues before it as at first.)

In that high realm, remote, obscure,
Where dwell the ever-living Ones
Dreaming the dream that shall endure,
Dwelt Doel Dermait and his sons;
Ancestral one, ancestored three,
So mixed in purpose, mind and mood,
No blade could split their mystery
Of progeny and parenthood.

Then, on a day out of all days,
A day filled full of earthly years,
The Gods fell silent in amaze,
For there had crashed against their ears
The sound that, deeply understood,
All hearts from hell to heaven stuns,
The cry of anguished parenthood,
Of stricken sire for vanished sons.

Ah! who but he who sagely sings
A rann concealed beneath his rhyme
Can fasten on eternal things
The terminology of time,
Or chant in ears to trifles bent
The burden of that awful cry

rann, a verse-form to which special powers were attributed.

That wakened through the firmament
The universal question, Why?

In Connacht—thus the story runs—
A king of slow but heavy hand
Shall ask and ask why Dermait's sons
For exile left their native land,
Until Cuchulain, on a quest,
Shall jar King Eochu's royalty,
And, roundly cursed by humbled zest,
Set forth to find the exiled three.

Oh! he will find them, he whose eye
Flames now towards his appointed deed;
And find the craft that can untie
The spirit's from the body's need.
He will unchain the captive hordes,
Unloose to song the tied of tongue,
And set all furrowed faces towards
The country of the Ever-young.

For when the knights, mead-head, blinked
Around his mother's marriage-mirth,
Dectere's pledging methel linked
Begettings of both sky and earth,
When to her draught a sun-flake flew,
Borne earthwards on a may-fly's wing,

mead, a drink made of fermented honey. *methel*, a cup for mead

And blent the father-fire of Lugh
With Prince Sualtam's husbanding.

And when her Son of Heaven came,
Bird-heralded in rainbow plume,
He smote the core of clay and flame
Into one equal heavenly doom,
One starry end of dream and deed,
Whose chanted annals will unroll
A tale where opened eyes may read
The vast adventure of the soul.

*He has moved backwards to the parting in the
curtain and disappears through it.*

II

THE FASCINATION OF FINDCHOEM

Findchoem, the dreamy daughter of Eochu Rond
(That King of Connacht on whose brain there beat
A tale of three king's sons who left their home
For where, for why, none knew, or knowing told),
Sat in the midst of throbbing harps and chants
Through long slow dusks of girlhood's innocence
And twilights of bewildered womanhood
In Eochu's feasting-hall; and in the shadows
Around the tales by which the labouring folk,
Huddling about the peat on gusty nights,
Wakened a far heart-lifting majesty
Out of a fantasy the day denied.
So had she gathered from heroic deeds
Chanted by bard or told by shanachie
Of Prince Setanta, called the Hound of Uladh,
A flowering legend of august renown
That filled the emptiness of day and night
With tints and odours life had yielded not,
And gleams of a rich season of the soul
When the long years had moved from flower to
fruit.

Beauty and lineage round Findchoem's feet
Allured the artifice that men called love.

But she had seen spring's beauty bend its bloom
Under the scorching summer of desire;
And she had watched the bud of life decline
From tenderness of childhood's blossoming
To the hard-rinded fruit of power and pride.
And when the forge of custom chained her life
To an importunate chieftain's, there began
A silent feud of sundered body and soul.
Mixed with the marriage-chant on happy lips
She caught the ultimate keening in the air
Of all things mortal, the most mortal, love
That had no certitude beyond the flesh.
But, curtailed by the subterfuge of day
And the cold acquiescence of the night,
She lived a life within a world of dreams,
And through the threnody of transient things
Heard the far harps of immortality,
And fortified herself on secret lore
That found disguise and utterance in song.

* * * *

*The heart that feeds on earthly bread
Shall starve on alien food.
Joy, that is benediction shed,
Shall sorrow under gathered good.
Love not for any need,
If you would love indeed.*

keening, chanting mournfully.

*Beauty and strength will bend the knee
At last to victor death.*

*Today's delights or dreads will be
Tomorrow a forgotten breath.*

*Spurn future, present, past,
If you would love to last.*

*Primrose and oak unfold to sight
Oak-leaf and primrose-flower.*

*Snow, that is water frozen white,
May turn to water in an hour.*

*Love that is love alone
Is love unchanging grown.*

* * * *

Then when the tumult of the Red Branch raid,
Out of the feast of Bricriu-bitter-tongue
In search of deeds to glorify a name,
Broke on the edge of Connacht, the proud king
Shook himself out of the fantastic mood
That the dim tale of Doel Dermait's sons
Put on his mind; and moved from post to post
Making the implements of strength and speed
(Spearmen and swordsmen, horses, charioteers)
Ready to meet impending circumstance.
Thus armed, King Eochu of the Golden Chain
Waited vicissitude's uncertain sign—
Friendship that masked the countenance of fight

To gloze the purpose of a greedy heart;
Or sudden deaths of men, and the long crying
Of widowed women, and the crying of children,
For some wild foray that would be forgotten
Before the wanton sorrow it had made.
But otherwise to Findchoem's listening heart
Came the hoarse whisper of things imminent.
Under life's veil she saw the common face
Of rancour bred by rancour, hate by hate;
And marked the frowning inference of speech
On smiling lips, or in the wary eye,
Because the will had lost the wish for peace.
From Druid knowledge learned in fosterage
She knew that in a moment's resonance
Made by the dissonant heart-strings to the strain
That Aengus fingered on the harp of life
A myriad paths would open unto joy,
And all the voices lifted to release
The heart of nature and humanity
Be echoes of the love that Dana sang
Beside the cradle of the infant earth.

So meditating on the mystery
That stood midway between the swinging scales
Weighted with all the glories of the world
Against the soul's imponderable gifts,
Findchoem had found at last a place of poise

Where that which might have been and that which
was

Commingled, and engendered in her heart
A sorrow softened by compassionate hope,
And certainty by patience solemnised.
Beyond the reach of fluctuant power she saw,
As far as dawn from midnight and as sure,
The calm omnipotence of tenderness,
And the authority of healing hands
Washed in the waters of austerity
To wield the sovereignty of passionless peace.

Then when the winds, rich with Cuchulain's name,
Cried the convergence of desire and life,
Findchoem set forth into the dusk to find
Acceptance or dismissal of her dream
When the slow weftage of prophetic stars
Moved through a myriad warps of destiny
To some fulfilment of celestial will
Beyond what faith endured or thought conceived;
And after hours of wakefulness and sleep
Stretched on her chariot's oscillating floor,
Sat, chin on hand, upon a grassy bank
That overlooked a rhythmic stretch of land
Spangled in hollows with misted silver of bog,
Mottled on slopes with dew-dark purple of heath.

Dim as a dream along the edge of sleep
The undulations of horizon-hills

Conjured the eye from sight to inner sound,
As though they shaped a murmur on wakened lips.
Above the peaks of their inaudible chant
Stood visible echoes in repeated clouds
That faded as they formed, yet, flushed with rose,
Maintained awhile the shapes of transiency
Against the grey of the unchanging sky.
Across the land, in seen and hidden curve,
Brook broadened into stream, stream into river,
Bearing the growing inference of speech
Into full voice across a shallow ford
A spear-cast out from Findchoem's sandalled feet
Sunken in moss.

Within a beechen wood,
Where silver stems were splashed with sunrise
gold,
The escort of the daughter of a king
Moved through their morning business, asking not
The purport of a march into the dawn,
Unarmed, and thus, despite the wary king,
Friendly to any embassy of fate.
For she who sat in pensiveness apart
Was of the haughty blood of Eochu Rond,
Inexplicably minded, straightly willed,
Beyond their understanding.

Findchoem sat
Rapt in her soul's translation of the gist

Of hills and clouds, of stream and bog and heath,
Whose line and curve, colour and shape and
 sound,
Firm-fixed or fluctuating, had a voice,
And in the deepening green and broadening leaf
By widening water spoke responding life
That moved within the flowing and the fixed
In mutual ministry past eye and ear.
So keenly did such servitors of song
Send their enchantment into brain and heart
In an exulting agony of joy,
That her imagination glowed and joined
The mystery of bestowal and response
That all things dark or lighted celebrate;
And the reflected ardour of the world
Shone as a glory round her hidden dream.

Across the ford, throbbing from travel, came
One on whose forehead shone a band of gold;
Not like the yellow chain her father wore
Twined in his hair as royal ornament,
But the thin strip that showed the charioteer
Whose hair the wind, in its exultant speed,
Might whip disastrously across his eyes.
And over this his golden helmet shone
In salutation to the rising sun.
Broadly across his shoulders flapped his cloak
Dull black as the black swan. Beneath its folds

Close to his body clung his deer-skin dress,
Light as the lissom creature it had clothed;
And like its limbs his arms moved bare and free
Serving the hands that on the driving-seat
Gathered the reins and wielded whip and goad
When the heroic spirit was a-wheel.

For he who came across the ford was Laeg,
Cuchulain's charioteer, the one sure brain
To drive Black Sanglain and the Grey of Macha,
Those mighty horses of the Hound of Uladh,
Behind the hero-will. And, beside Laeg,
Came he whom fame called Lugaidh of the Stripes
Because his body bore the natal sign
Of triple ancestry. Youthful and strong
He was, beyond the strength of tested knights;
With haughty look that hinted of a throne
When Eiré's kings divined, in solemn feast,
One born to be Ard Righ.

But not from these
Confident ministers of speed and strength,
Who shook with energy the morning's calm,
Came the authority of eminence
That Findchoem fashioned into godlike shape
Out of a thousand stories, and had set
Less on the throne than in the firmament
That arched her soul's desire. For well she knew
That, of the Red Branch foliage, one leaf

Ard Righ (pron. *ree*): High or Chief King.

Outgrew the rest, and with uplifted hand,
Within whose veins the essence of the earth
Trellised the solar glory glimmering through,
Averred the comradeship of clay and sun.

*And as the Red Branch heroes quickly stepped
From stone to stone across the crawling stream
In search of what the morning might afford
Of deeds to silence Bricriu-bitter-tongue,
Findchoem, unknown to them as they to her,
Though knowledge came, lifted her eyes and said:*

FINDCHOEM.

No! neither you, nor you, were prophesied
For the fulfilment of life's mystery
In the deep unity of soul and soul
Beyond the blandishments of tongue and eye
That set between the heart and its true peace
The blinding flame of bodily desire.
Yet there is something in your step and glance
That has the gesture of a single will.
And, since all things are willed beyond our wills,
I think your destinies and mine are mixed
In an allegiance that will be made plain
This day; although, guessing a threat of fire
From the first glint in tinder, I am moved
To claim protection of a husband's name
Against your searching eyes. (*Thereon she rose
Fearless and calm*).

LUGAIDH. . Why, then, have you come here,
Tricked in allurements of untidiness .
That magnify both what is hidden and seen,
If not on some adventure of the flesh?

LAEG.

I think I know what fathered that face,
And loosed alarming beauty on the world.

FINDCHOEM.

All that is needed of identity
And destiny, if we have eyes and ears,
May be uncovered by some song—like this:

*My father braids into his hair
A chain of beaten gold.
And I in feast or foray wear
Locks in unceremonious fold
Proudly inherited
From that proud peevish head.*

LAEG.

Either she is the daughter of Eochu Rond,
Or one who lives, like him, in waking dreams.

FINDCHOEM.

*My father rides into the fray
In gold and purple dressed;
Gold-hilted sword to clear his way,
Bronze-bordered shield to guard his breast.
My simpler suit is meet
Where triumph asks defeat.*

LUGAIDH.

Her parentage is fixed. What splits my thought
Is her vague talk of triumph and defeat.

FINDCHOEM.

*My father darkly broods upon
Dim legends of the Gael;
And wonders whither they have gone,
The vanished heroes of a tale
The chanting harper thrums.—
I dream of one who comes.*

LAEG.

Now the device upon the shield appears.

FINDCHOEM.

*Chieftains and bards applaud his pith,
Swift hand, consuming eyes.
My heart discerns beneath their myth
The hidden Danann enterprise;
And, past his warrior's weals,
Unto his Godhood kneels.*

LAEG (*to Lugaidh*).

Only one man in Eirinn plainly owns
The double fatherhood of man and god.

LUGAIDH.

That is our mighty chief, Sualtam's son
In body, and in soul the son of Lugh
Who rules with double hand both day and night.

Of many a chief, because, to please its fancy,
Life on my limbs and countenance had spread
That gloss on the repugnance of the flesh,
Beauty, the terrible sweet interval
Between the ugliness of coming life
And the defilement of its going hence;
That brief disclosure of some perfectness
Beyond our imperfections, that the Gods
Flash in men's eyes as hints of lost estate.

(LUGAIDH.

'I think a worm gnaws through the poets' staves.

LAEG.

When it is done, there may be better songs).

FINDCHOEM.

In that assemblage of unnatural need
One had his way through subtler subterfuge
Than his mendacious fellows; knew my body,
But left the soul in lonely spinsterhood.
And in that alienating intimacy
I missed the comradeship true marriage knows
Because it sets the fervours of the flesh
To serve alone the purpose of the soul.
Still, to my heart's intention life vouchsafed
For my ascending feet the lesser lights
By which to climb through darkness to the dawn.
For I have learned that, while chained women give
Children to men, men's children will remain

The harsh desiring offspring of desire,
Enslaving and enslaved; but that when man
Gives woman children, for no mere caprice
Of passion, but because her nature hears
The call of Life beyond its transient lives,
And man in solemn partnership responds,
Then shall the fierce Fomorian sensual flame
Be quenched, and the De Dananns walk the world
In Godly fellowship with godlike man.

(LUGAIDH.

I hear the splash of forest-fallen trees.

LAEG.

And after that there will be clearer sky).

FINDCHOEM.

Oh! now, because my being has endured
Monstrous invasion of a force that wrought
Mutual dethronement and humiliation,
I have, in front of my own soul, resolved
That no man who subjects not all his powers
To the high purpose life to each assigns,
Shall subjugate again to his desire
The awakened daughter of King Eochu Rond.
So has my spirit set its high desire
On the chief man of all the world because
I can transform into their essences
His famed accomplishments of hand and eye
That from the spirit's masquerade have fallen

Into men's foolish tales of wounds and death.
Oh! I can wrest his godlike heroism
From the distorted fantasy of men
Who have defiled even childhood's friendly hands
With murder's desecrating implements,
And earn therefor the sure strike-back of doom
When time has forged a weapon adequate
For the condign avengement of the spirit
On those who smear their own blood-guiltiness
On the unguarded hearts of innocence.

(LUGAIDH.

Why does she lift aloft protecting arms
As if to parry an impending blow?

LAEG.

Rapt in the future she forgets the present.)

FINDCHOEM.

And yet, for all their fallenness, they wear
The tatters of the Danann lineage
With dim-remembering gesture, and remain
In satisfactions all unsatisfied,
Because in each subsidence into clay
There is a secret search for buried stars.
Only for this and an enduring hope,
The Gods had ground them back to primal dust,
And sighed, and set life's wheel a-whirl again,
Seeking a substance more amenable
To heavenly will than this hard earthly stuff.

Oh! all attainment of felicity
Rests on the firm allegiance of the heart
Unto the spirit, as mine unto Cuchulain.

*(Out of the amplitude about them came
A voice melodious with all mastery
That called 'Laeg! Lugaidh!' and the hero-twain
Answered 'We come!' and hastened towards the call.
And Findchoem smiled, and set herself again
On the green bank, and murmured):*

FINDCHOEM.

He has come!

I know that voice. I know that its commands
Henceforth take on a new authority
Whose quiet shall bewilder noisy pride,
And melt the trivial in its majesty.
Now shall the heartless tyrannies of power
Quail at the shake of an omnipotent arm
When in the near prophetic moment he
Shall speak the spirit's liberating word
That strikes the fetters off the wrist of man.

*(And as her winged imagination stirred,
Seeking to set substance and shade apart,
With song she stilled her agitated heart,
And out of tales and her own dreamings drew
Her spirit-vision of the Son of Lugh).*

* * * *

*Who wills may flaunt in earthly steel
Behind the speeding yoke.
But there is one whose robes conceal
The garments of the Danann folk.
He wears from neck to knee
The fleeces of the Sidhe.*

*Angers flame forth, but come again
To quench the soul in gloom.
He rides above the moods of men
Dealing the high decrees of doom;
Flashing from sky to sod
The splendour of a God.*

*Not what is fought for, but the fight,
Shall destiny fulfil.
He comes undarkened out of night.
He tastes the sunrise on a hill,
Moving on quiet feet,
Shining, and young, and sweet.*

* * * *

*(And as the lapsing wavelets of her song
Subsided into silence, gravely came
A hero-figure, calm in radiant youth,
So made in her imagination's mould
It might have thinned into the filmy air
Out of a moment's frail fantastic life
To mingle with the rhythm of breaking leaves*

*And a new springtime's wonderment of wings.
But being flesh and blood, though under these
Glowed the veiled light of Lugh, Cuchulain stood,
Holding a gleaming spear in his right hand,
While Findchoem, of his presence unaware,
Uttered her heart's high purpose in a song).*

* * * *

*There came a Queen of high renown
Across the seas from Spain,
Who laid a jewelled sceptre down
A lauded hero's love to gain;
And sighed, because his thought
A deeper kinship sought.*

*There came the Goddess of red war
A warrior's love to claim,
Who, unrequited, sought to scar
His countenance with angry flame.
He fears no feebler fire
Who has the Sun for sire.*

*She comes, the daughter of a King,
Neither to break nor bind.
Beyond the stream she seeks the spring,
And through unstable sense to find
The single pulse that beats
When spirit spirit meets.*

* * * *

(LAEG (*to Cuchulain*)).

When we made question what her purpose was,
She spoke a wisdom older than the world.

LUGAIDH.

Or something men may think of ages hence
After disaster shakes them into thought.

CUCHULAIN.

And now she speaks what has no time or place,
But is the spirit's dateless utterance,
And being so, betters what came or comes.
For what is past is but the thither side
Of that which comes and in due season goes.
Even so the vaunted valour of the arm
Flashes through fame to ultimate defeat
By death, which life mixes with all things mortal,
Or by the deadening bitterness of heart
That, after festivals of triumph, knows
Though much was chanted little was achieved;
And even the Red Branch glory may become
A tale half told and all misunderstood
When passed by foolish tongues to muffled ears
Among the shadows of a failing fire.
But they whose eyes, like hers, are spirit-lit,
Know that the power that shall recall men's deeds
Into the commonalty of the heart
Rests not on love that is not of the soul,
Though offered by a Queen, or on the threat

Of agony and death, though it be made
By the red Goddess of insensate war; .
But from the spirit comes, and thither goes,
Bearing its flag from valley unto ridge
Because in all the venturings of man
Only ascension justifies the march.)

*Unto the bank where Findchoem silent sat
As though she pondered her articulate soul,
Cuchulain moved in noble dignity
Bearing the spear across his palms, and said:*

Oh! thou hast in thy slight and royal hands
The strength of love to blunt the keenest blade
That man has edged to meet the stroke of man,
Or turn it to the purpose of the Gods
When they disclose a destined enterprise.
I lay this worthless weapon at thy feet.

*Then Findchoem rose in quiet queenliness
That put a lucid splendour on her dress
And on her hair an aureole arrayed;
And lifted on her palms the hero-blade,
And gazed upon it with maternal eyes
As though her hands had fashioned shape and size
In Druid spear-smith's furnace, golden red;
And like a priestess offered it, and said:*

FINDCHOEM.

Take it again, and give to it your worth;
For there was never spear or shield, though made
By Culain for a King, whose blade could boast
More virtue than is in the wielding hand.

*Cuchulain took the spear and drove its haft
Into the earth, like a bright-budded graft
For some tremendous fruitage, bowed his head
To Findchoem; and to Laeg and Lugaidh said:*

CUCHULAIN.

Take the wise daughter of proud Eochu Rond
To Cruachan and the friendship of Queen Maeve
And Ailell, and thereafter Emain Macha.

LAEG.

Not to Dundéalgan and the fostering care
Of the Queen Emer?

CUCHULAIN.

No, for there the heart
And body dare the perils of repose,
The slow descent from the exalted will
Into the soft and acquiescent mood
That satisfaction gives; and *that* means death;
Not the great going-forth with open eyes
That, in the mighty spirit's agelessness,
Reckons a thousand deaths of no account,
Only dropped leaves from off the branch of life;
Not this, but the slow dimming of the spirit

That crowds the ways with dead men travelling.
No! I am linked with ancient loyalties
Beyond the passing humours of the hearth,
Kinships in the adventure of the soul
That has no story tellable on harps.

FINDCHOEM.

Yes, they of the mild chanting brotherhood,
Who are the servants of the obvious light,
Confer their praises on the common hour
Because, being loud and gaudy, they fill the ear
And eye with what the stunted brain may grasp.
They have no song for what is past their eyes,
Or praise for condescending Gods who hide
Their glory in garments recognisable,
And move along the frontier-lands of sight.

{LAEG (*to Lugaidh*).

She is putting magic on Cuchulain's mind).

FINDCHOEM.

But they who live beyond the mere event,
Who feel behind the pale inadequate word
The vast authority of silences
That are the parents of all utterance,
These know the speech of Ogma in their own,
The Harp of Dagda throbbing in their veins,
And have no need for men's poor deeds or praise.

LUGAIDH.

Cuchulain! there are deeds to be sought out
To meet the taunt of Bricriu-bitter-tongue.

CUCHULAIN.

I have seen through that shrewd jester and his jest
That men take seriously, and I have ready
A sharp rejoinder. I have done with deeds
Save those that come unbid, inevitably.
Henceforth deeds may seek me.

And to the north

*Cuchulain turned; and in his wake went forth
Laeg and Lugaidh, and, radiantly between,
Findchoem, who walked as an ascended Queen.
And all that day, securely charioted,
By lake-side and by mountain-side they sped.
And in the night through Manach's haunted wood
They went; and in a rose-red morning stood
On the strong-guarded threshold of Queen Maeve
Answering a welcome generous and grave.
And the great Queen to her protection took
Findchoem, and rest within an arrased nook.*

From Ferthan Ford, across whose shallow stream
Chariots and footmen after deed or dream
Passed and repassed; and from the burial mound
Of Tetach, in whose dedicated ground
Mingled the dust of heroes who, being dead,
Lived on the Pleasant Plain; in silence sped

The escort of the daughter of a King
Heavy with tidings of a woeful thing,
When in proud Eochu's ear the tale they set
Of the recession of the Red Branch threat—
This much in solace for a sharper blow
Than honourable death, their word of woe
Of how the wave which turned and left the west
Bore the bright branch of Connacht on its crest.

III

THE CURSE OF EOCHU ROND

Lugh and the Son of Lugh together rose
And met on Cruachan's rampart, mighty walled,
Beyond whose frown the hungry plover called,
And wild bees watched the honey-blooms unclose.

Out of the silence of receding night
The bards of Maeve through brisk ablution sprang,
And through the hum of harps in concert sang
Their salutation to the Lord of Light.

* * * *

MORNING CHANT TO LUGH

i

*Again thy burnished blade,
Driving the darkness through,
Comes from the sheath of shade.
Hark to our homage, Lugh!*

*And, mingled with thine own
High praise this morning hour,
Life's homage seeks the throne
Of that ancestral Power*

*Who rayed the Danann thought
Into thy golden brain;*

*And through thy substance wrought
The dark Fomorian strain;*

*And in their mingling made
Life's rhythmic interplay—
In light the shield of shade,
In darkness dreams of day.*

ii

*Let earth and ocean raise
Their lauds in wave and wind:
Thou hast thy perfect praise
In human heart and mind.*

*Greatly the grass and trees
Thy sustentation sing.
Oh! greater far than these
We chant a deeper thing:*

*That to the soul's desire
And the desiring eyes
Thou givest searching fire
And light that purifies.*

*Emblazoned with thy name
Proudly our foreheads burn.
Out of thy light we came,
And, light to Light, return.*

iii

*Master of every art!
Maker of king and crown!*

*Thou hast, in whole or part,
The ultimate renown.*

*Beneath our wisest word
In sound or wood or stone
Thou hast our yearning stirred
To offer thee thine own.*

*In ardent bardic strain,
Flash of heroic brand,
Light of conceiving brain,
Fire of creating hand;*

*In placid will to bend,
In passionate will to do,
Thou art our source and end.
Hark to our homage, Lugh!*

* * * *

Sweet scents of flowers across the quiet land
Brought hints of earthy friendships on the wind.
One watchful heart the proffered peace declined
With direful weapons in a straining hand.

For in Cuchulain's dreams an ominous wing
Had searched the night with enmity, and closed
Over the couch where dreamlessly reposed
The daughter of a proud and angry king.

Within her room the drowsy ear of Maeve
Caught a far throb like thunder in the south,
Or hasting shower to quench a season's drouth,
Or on a shore the thud of wave on wave.

Swiftly, to him who watched, sound into sight
Transformed itself: no shower, no wave on strand,
But martial men hard-riding spear in hand
Led by a hero panoplied for fight.

And when the horsemen came to rest beyond
The sudden shiftings of alert surmise,
The host of Hymani, with angry eyes,
Were ranked behind their chieftain, Eochu Rond.

From his broad shoulders, purple fold on fold,
His broidered mantle fell to regal rest
Over the tunic on his heaving breast,
Its silver border crossed by bordered gold.

Firm on his dappled horse, he seemed to sit
As a carved image by a Druid priest,
While with swift-lashing tail the fiery beast
Sidled and stamped and champ'd a golden bit.

On his long hair glimmered a golden chain;
And from his eyes flamed parenthood outraged;
And ceaselessly a ghostly question waged
Vague warfare for the lordship of his brain.

Hymani, Eochu's part of Connacht.

For from old songs he, in his feasting-hall,
Had learned, from chanting voice and harping
hand,
Of how three princes left their native land,
But learned not why, and *why* was all in all.

And, since no tongue could tell save one possessed
Of mighty will to break desire and ease
And track the exiles through the Seven Seas,
Waiting that one, King Eochu knew no rest.

Then, when the King had reached his darkest
mood,
Came voices on a demon-haunted gale,
Making of Findchoem's love a lustful tale
That fired his blood with frenzied fatherhood,

And called him wildly forth to mount, to seize
Tools for the flesh's riving stoutly made,
And for belauded foes a shrewder blade
Subtly annealed in Druid mysteries.

And since Cuchulain's name inspired applause
For godlike prowess on the hard-fought field,
King Eochu dared the fate of those who wield
The spirit's weapon in the body's cause.

Round Cruachan's walls he swiftly sent a glance
Mingling the mortal enmities of men

With dooms beyond the reach of human ken,
And at Cuchulain cast his magic lance.

Whereat the Hound, disdainng haft or hilt,
Magic by magic turned, and swiftly speared
With Eochu's blade his horse, that wildly reared
And on the ground the king ignobly spilt.

Then sprang Cuchulain from the rampart wall,
Weaponless but for secret Danann charms,
Gathered the breathless king within his arms;
And lightly bore him to the palace hall.

And when Cuchulain in heroic jest
Made Eochu a great laughter in all eyes,
Lacking a weapon for the hand's emprise
The humbled king laid on him the hard test

That never, while he sit or lie or stand,
Shall he have rest till from the exiled ones
He bring the secret—why the royal sons
Of Doel Dermait left their native land.

Then went Cuchulain's blood-stream thick and
cold,
Putting a pallid vision in his face
Of deeds outdoing battle, raid or chase;
A saga no proud harpers yet had told,

Because their eyes glimpsed only the event
Of warrior's deed and woman's crowning kiss,
Bridal and birth and burial; but this
Was crowded round with wild bewilderment

Of what no hand could seize, no eye could see,
And Powers that would his tree of valour shake
Till he should shed mortality and take
His natal burden of divinity;

And, counting not who censures, who applauds,
Surmount Sualtam earthy in his veins,
Follow the light of Lugh where it constrains,
And ratify his kinship with the Gods.

* * * *

Cuchulain sat in his accustomed seat
At Emain Macha, drinking hazel-mead;
For days of travel and portentous deed
Had rusted the resilience of his feet.

And as he drank, a Druid wind arose
Out of a cloud that magically spread
And hid the hero-light that round his head
Had made a mortal terror for his foes.

A blood-hot murmur spread among the spears
Ranked by the wall. A raven, blazing, cried
And passed. The red-yew pillar at his side
Glowed with the sunsets of a thousand years.

Under his feet the Earth, recovering
An ancient passion, sent through soil and stone
Invisible flame that burned him to the bone
And made his blood a swirling maddened thing.

A sudden incandescence in his brain
Fused in a blinding point thought's ravelled ends.
Thereat he rose and cried, "Now, now descends
The Curse of Eochu of the Golden Chain!"

He dashed his drinking-horn upon the ground,
And watched the wine flame up about the board.
He seized his spear and shield, he seized his
sword,
Shaking the palace with appalling sound.

And when he staggered out, those two deep
friends,
Laeg and Lugaidh, by marsh and wooded hill
Followed to meet the signals of his will,
—And whispered each to each, "The Curse
descends!"

And as he hastened onward (says the tale)
Nine braziers gathered in Cuchulain's path,
And drew the dread rejoinder of his wrath
With clamorous demand for meat and ale.

That night the tattlers talked of headless men,
And poets chanted of a hero's rage,
Around the hearthstone. But an agéd sage
Sat in the shadow, and the tale again

Whispered till it became a Mystery
Of fleshly Powers that with the Spirit war,
Seeking to make a weedy servitor
Of Life. None heard that inner tale but he.

So he kept silence. And kept silence still
When by the fire the talk was all again
Of hero-anger and of headless men
On the deep-wooded verge of Macha's Hill,

Where, in the shadows of primeval trees,
Nine smiths of Uladh's King, great Conchubar,
Laboured on spear and shield and battle-car
With stroke and din and flaming sorceries,

Until, in grime and sweat (so runs the tale),
They set themselves across Cuchulain's path,
And drew the dread rejoinder of his wrath
With clamorous demand for meat and ale.

And, while the gossips honey-liquor sipped,
Murmured unto himself the shadowed sage,
His inner eye upon a hidden page
Whereon he read, in unrecorded script,

A tale that deepened to a Mystery
Of Powers of sense with spirit Powers at feud,
Seeking to set the chain of servitude
Upon the soul. None read that tale but he.

“And that is well,” he mused. “They who have
wrought

Deeds for remembrance paused not to disturb
Their passion with compassion, nor may curb
The body’s frenzy with the chill of thought

Till they out-battle the futility
Of battle, and with luminous laughter break
The glamour of mortality, and take
Their destined burden of divinity;

And, counting not who censures, who applauds,
Silence the cry of earth within their veins,
Follow the spirit’s light where it constrains,
Till they can gaze unblinking on the Gods.”

* * * *

Eastward and seaward marched the pilgrim three,
Cuchulain, Laeg and Lugaidh; hand and lip
Busied with ancient storied comradeship,
And warm with unperturbed affinity

Of natural sure sovereignty of will;
Hand, eye and rein to answer it with speed;

And judgement to conform the body's deed
To spirit purpose with unerring skill.

In waking trance Cuchulain's eye retrieves
Lost meaning in the bared exploring root
Responsive to high purposes; his foot
Wakens a wistful whispering of leaves

Whose friendliness becomes a living part
Of some vast Power that in his being shakes
Bough-bare his tree of valour, and that breaks
The double barricade of brain and heart;

So that his essence through a myriad pores
Into the air invisibly exudes,
And shackles of identity eludes
Past sleepy warders of wide-open doors.

Yet, though of selfhood all divested, he
For no lost shred of satisfaction grieves,
But, rid of date and circumstance, receives
The reinforcement of infinity.

Then, to the silent question of the twain,
Laeg and Lugaidh who stride behind his heels,
Back to mortality he slips, and feels
The Curse of Eochu of the Golden Chain.

Within his eyes a sun of rapture sets.
Yet, as the marsh-fire on a reedy swamp
Lights from past day a reminiscent lamp,
Something remains from all that he forgets.

In tinkling runnel and in talking brook
He feels Sualtam's blood flow to the sea:
The setting sun edging a stately tree
Is long-hand Lugh's interrogating look.

Behind him Emain Macha is a fire
Of chivalry that has out-burnt its hour,
And Macha's Height a grave of buried power:
Before is the allurements of desire,

Dun Dealgan and fair Emer, the heart's home,
And quiet that the storms of passion stills.
Northward are clouded inarticulate hills;
Eastward, dim waters eloquent in foam.

* * * *

And at the break of day, the tattlers told
Around the hearthstone, while the gossiping lip
Glistened with honey-mead, there came a ship
With silken sails brodered with gems and gold,

And stemmed and sterned with carven unicorns,
And crammed with royal gifts for Conchubar
Brought with a king's deep homage from afar,
Choice gifts of silk, satin and drinking-horns.

Then while ship-shape they ordered oars and
spars,
The sailors chanted in seafaring staves:
“Our arms are tired breaking the butting waves.
Our eyes are twisted staring at the stars.”

Crazy with hunger after gale on gale,
They crossed Cuchulain on his questing path,
And drew the dread rejoinder of his wrath
With clamorous demand for meat and ale.

And while the tattlers talked of headless men,
Save him who “Mercy!” cried, and mercy won,
He being lucky-starred and a king’s son,
The agéd sage pondered the tale again

Till its unuttered purport he divined:
For he had grown so very wisely old
He knew that not a story had been told
But had another story in its mind.

Through the thin veil of this his ear could guess
Thrice-routed Powers that with the Spirit war.
Substance nor strength had moved its purpose, nor
These subtle ministers of friendliness

Whose offering thrills the hand or lights the eyes
With luring touch or lustrous opulence,

That, unregenerate, are the pimps of sense,
But, sanctified, may be the soul's allies.

* * * *

"Mercy!" the king's son cried (so ends the tale,
And let who will its inner story find,
Feast on the fruit within the tinted rind);
"How should our eyes, moidhered by spume and
gale,

Have sight for anything but that which stills
Hunger and thirst and body-weariness?
How should we know, in our most deep distress,
The Hound of Uladh and the deed he wills?

Else had our homage clasped his mighty knees,
And our sea-wandering and world-knowing eyes
Been happy lackeys to his enterprise
Among the islands of the Seven Seas!"

Then went Cuchulain's heart out to the lad,
Who was a king's son and benignly starred.
The gateway of his friendship he unbarred
Because his heart deep intimation had

That when it sheds mortality, and takes
Once more the burden of divinity,
The comradeship of heavenly ministry
In unexpected hands its offering makes

moidhered: bewi]dered.

Of news to steer the eager fated wing;
Not of the landing-place, he being no friend
Who not the means bestoweth but the end,
Breaking the need of high adventuring.

* * * *

So, when Cuchulain's feet kneaded the sand
Restlessly where a wave recedes and runs,
And once more came the question, Why the sons
Of Doel Dermait left their native land;

There was no answer on the traveller's tongue,
But in his hand a sea-charmed instrument
Which towards far lands a magic finger bent;
And the slim ship with invitation swung

Seaward on waves that woke and stretched and
snored
Along the gunwale; and winglike overhead
The silken sails shook out and flapped and spread,
As fresh Ultonian seamen trod the board.

Unto the signs the hero-hearts respond,
(Cuchulain, Laeg and Lugaidh), stung with zest
To hasten seaward on the destined quest
That should disperse the Curse of Eochu Rond,

And bring Cuchulain rest for foot and hand,
And win him woman's joy and monarch's grace,
And a great shout round his accustomed place,
When his returning prow should ridge the land.

In ogham signs Cuchulain carved his name
On a spear-shaft, and gave the token-spear
Unto the lad with words of knightly cheer,
And on his shoulders laid the mighty claim

To fill his place at Emain till had run
The toll of days in their home-circling line;
And to the ready seamen gave the sign,
And leaped on board and sailed into the sun.

ogham: ancient Irish alphabet.

IV

THE ISLAND OF CAPTIVITY

i

On an island somewhere to the west of Eiré: not the island reported by the voyager Bran son of Febal to be peopled only by women; or the Shining Island where Fand, the wife of the God of the Sea, lived; or the island of Manannan (later the Isle of Man), the God of the Sea himself, for this was to the east of Eiré, and the east is the place of beginnings, while the west is the place of terminations before new beginnings, and the play is a play of such, though dated some thousands of years ago.

Nothing of the island is seen. What is seen is a room, obviously built of timber. The walls are hung with cloths and the floor is covered with carpets whose designs suggest tradition but whose craftsmanship suggests the routine labour of long-term prisoners. Both suggestions are correct. The room is, in fact, the first-class cell of an extensive convict colony whose patrons are drawn from the Seven Islands that constitute the known world. Most of the inhabitants of the Seven Islands find themselves, at one time or another, under the care of Eochu Glas, the chief jailer of the colony from time immemorial, and seldom, if ever, shed its influence. At

rare intervals, perhaps once in an aeon, the special apartment is occupied by prisoners of sufficient eminence to warrant its use. This is one of those occasions; the occupants being the three sons of the legendary king, Doel Dermait, whose disappearance from their own land had sent another king mad to find the reason why; and he had put geasa on Cuchulain, known as the Hound of Uladh, to do the finding for him.

At the moment there is nothing in the apartment but an empty fireplace, and a large chest made of wood and metal bands.

A man's voice approaches humming an archaic chant. In a moment Aedh, the serving man of the Three Sons, enters. He carries sods of turf in a wicker basket in his hands, and two unlit torches tucked under each arm. He sets down the basket of turf in front of the fireplace; and then proceeds to insert the torches in rings in the wall, and, being ancestrally connected with the island of Eiré somewhere beyond the eastern horizon, not only chants at his work, but makes up the chant as he goes along.

AEDH.

*At sunrise this morning I heard great talk
When Lugh, with his shield all winking bright,*

*Went strutting aloft like the cock-of-the-walk,
Till up speaks Balor (from nowhere in sight)*

*And says: " You're a shiny man, sir.
But it's all in the will of the tinder-spark
If yourself or myself may lift our head,
For the back of the light is the front of the dark."
Now riddle me that (as the riddler said),
Come riddle me that if you can, sir.*

*(He proceeds to arrange the sods of turf in the
fireplace).*

*A fiery fellow at evening's fall
Stepped out in a goldish cloak arrayed
As if he was king-of-the-castle and all,
Till up speaks a bogman, his foot on a spade,
And says: " You're a sprightly man, sir.
But you'll not get far till the sod is turned,
And the turf is dried and tidily spread,
For the half of burning is what is burned."
Now riddle me that (as the riddler said),
Come riddle me that if you can, sir.*

BRIGID, the serving woman who looks after the room of the Three Sons (barring fire and light) stumbles in, apparently in excitement, carrying a load of rushes which she drops on the floor near Aedh after kicking away a mat to leave room on the earthen floor.

BRIGID.

There's bedding for the Three Sons of a King—
If they be so; and Balor carry them off
For botherations!

AEDH. If it is for Three King's Sons
You scatter rushes, is there any need
To smother *me* with them, or puff in my face
As if you had been working?

BRIGID. Working, indeed!
If what has happened *me* had happened *you*,
You'd have no puff at all left in your body,
But be the only mourner at your funeral,
Scared to your death!

AEDH. It surely must have been
Something beyond the common flurried you.
Maybe you'll share the story? (*wheeling*).

BRIGID (*nothing loth; speaking and spreading rushes at
the same time*). Cutting rushes
I was, I and my sister, in the swamp
By the white rampart over against the sea,
When in a wink up sails the queerest craft
I've seen with open eyes, though I have seen
Some twice as queer in dreams.

AEDH. What made it queer?

BRIGID.

All sorts of gold and silver adornments it had.
A carved god, or a king maybe, in front.
A painted thing spread on its hinder end

All twists and turns that sent me skelly-eyed
Trying to find where one of them might start
And another stop. Great silken sails it had
Wagging to left and right (much like the kilt
Of a swaggering hero) when she faced the wind.

AEDH.

That's a good story's start.

BRIGID.

Yerra, that's nothing

To what comes after. Three men made a show
Cocked up in front: dressed for a play you'd
think—

Kilts, cloaks and brooches, sandals, spears and
shields.

The one that might be leader had a spear
Would give you the death-stiffness in advance,
As if it had no need to strike a blow,
But could plant foes in graves with half a glance.

AEDH (*in subdued excitement, half to himself*).

Only one man has leave to wield that weapon,
If it's the one I've heard in many a chant.
Buan's lad, Bolg, made it from the frame
Of a sea-monster scattered on the strand,
So full of rage of battle with its kin
That even its bones could not lie out in peace.
But what would bring that warrior to this place?
(*To Brigid*) There's something strange abroad!
Had they no sign

Bolg: pron. Bullig.

Like what great heroes put upon their shields?

BRIGID.

Now that you ask, I saw a sprig of a tree
Painted—but that was the colour of fresh blood,
And not the brown and green of oak and fir
Or any tree I know.

AEDH (*ominously*). What's to prevent it
From being the sign of the Red Branch?

BRIGID. That's a guess
At something deep.

AEDH (*suspiciously*). I'm thinking you have more
To tell than you have told. That blood-red sign
Doesn't go trapesing round the world for sport,
But after glory and spoils, or on the search
For some deep mystery, and in its wake
Leaves chants on conquered men.

BRIGID. Whatever they're after,
The three were on the ground before you'd say
Whether they lept or flew, or were one place
This minute, and another the minute after.

AEDH.

That was the speed of more than common men.

BRIGID.

The one that might be leader, in the middle,
Had first the red-gold look as if the sun
Was shining out of him instead of *on* him.
And then, before you knew, his skin was red
The same as potters' clay. I couldn't tell

"What island is this?" quite sharp. As sharp
says I:

"You may give this island any name you please.
You may call it after the Three Prisoners,
Or after the Four Jailers (leaving out
The chief of them, who sets them all their work,
Eochu the Green—a terrible fellow)" says I.

"And on this island three and four make seven,
And so we have Seven Kings." "Do you tell me
that?"

Says he, quite impudent. "I do," says I.

"And what is more," says I (for I surmised
He and his friends had not come here with gifts,
But with intent to carry something off)—

AEDH (*to himself*).

Or maybe find an answer to a question
That I have heard of in a morning dream—

BRIGID (*not to be diverted*).

"And what is more," says I, "is that each king
Has seven victories threshing over his head,
And the husks of seven foes under his feet."
And then says I, to test his fire, "Each queen
Has seven serving-maidens, girls whose looks
Could not be equalled any where or when."

ADEH.

I guess how he looked then.

BRIGID.

And you guess wrong.

He looked just the reverse, which vexed me so,

I said: "It's usual with our Seven Kings
To let no pirate from the lawless waters
Land here without permission, or reach his home
(Save as a ghost) should he stay seven years,
Or even seven hundred." But in a flash
I knew I had said wrong; that if he came
For something, it was right it should be taken,
For maybe he was prophesied to take it,
And seventy-seven kings could not prevent it.
But at that minute the bewildering sun
Got in my eyes, and made that hero look
As if his head was holding up the sky;
And in his hand a blade of sudden light
Went through my neck so swift it left my head
Just where it was.

AEDH. Now that brings to my mind
A story told of him whose hand alone
Could swing the spear you saw. A way he had
Of docking people's heads—or maybe it was
His own was docked. But whether his own or not,
It always stood next day in its own place.

BRIGID.

That's but a story. What I say's the truth.

AEDH.

Maybe there's lies in truth, and truth in lies,
And we're both true and false at the one time;
And that insulted hero who docked your head,
Who knows but he may be—

BRIGID (*impatiently*).

Whoever he was,
I gave him no more time to give back-talk
Than you. I grabbed my load, and set my eyes
Straight for this place. "Duty comes first," says I.
"The three imprisoned sons of Doel Dermait,
Whatever be their fault, must have their beds
Readied as usual." Then they gave each other
A knowing look, as if they had found a secret,
Though I had said my say into myself.
And I shinned off—of course passing the news
To Coirpre Cundaël, for that hearty giant
Is always keen for fight.

AEDH.

What of your sister?

BRIGID.

The last I heard of her was droning out
A chant that names the Seven Kings of the island.
She prides herself that in our family
A thousand years ago there was a bard,
And maybe making chants runs in the blood
Like many another kind of divilment,
At least in hers. But here she comes herself,
Bursting with news.

BLANAD (sister of Brigid, and second serving-woman
of the Three Sons of Doel Dermait, who looks
after their food and drink) *enters, carrying
various parcels of stuffs for the evening meal.
She sets the parcels in any handy place where*

they will not obstruct her talk, which is more important than anything else.

BLANAD. Well, *that's* a dainty story
My sister must have told you, right or wrong,
And I must put a finish to—a story
Our ancestor that was the famous bard
Could make into a poem twice as fine
As any bard from here to Eiré could
In twenty years. No sooner went your head
Up in the air—

AEDH. Isn't it on her neck?

BRIGID (*demonstrating it*).

Right as a trivet.

BLANAD (*nonplussed*). Well, maybe there's two heads
To every story, or else it is two stories
To every head, according to the side
That tells the story. Whatever way it is,
Whether you lost your head or I lost mine,
The spirit of the bard stood up in me
And stretched a threatening arm (like this) and
said:
"Young man, whoever and whatever you may be
(And it's thinking I am you're somebody that's
something),
I'll put a rann upon you that will stop
Your waving that sharp weapon in the air."
With that I looked him steady in the eye
And let him have the names of the Seven Kings.

*Seven Kings. The leading one
Dian, Lugaidh's wily son.
Second comes that hefty man,
Leo, son of Iachtan.
Third, the hero of the course,
Eogan of the milk-white horse.
Fourth, his voice like battle-drums,
Great Fiachna Fuath comes.
Fifth, with handsome head in air,
Out steps Coirpre called the Fair.
Sixth, Con Sidi, tough and tall.
Senach Salderc last of all—*

"But by no means the last of them," says I,
"Though there's no rhyme to match his quality."

AEDH.

Well, if that sounding catalogue of kings
Didn't put fear into Cuchulain's heart
(If so he was), I don't know what would do it.

BLANAD.

Cuchulain or not (and what put *that* in your head?)
If that line-up of champions didn't put
Fear on him, it put something just as good,
For he and his two friends were back on board
Their crazy craft so quick you'd hardly think
They ever had set foot on the white rampart.
Away she sailed, slowly—and mark you this,
Not *on* the water, but *above* the water,
Three feet, or four, as near as I could judge.

AEDH and BRIGID.

What!

BLANAD. You may well say *what*. You recollect
It was a ship with the same flighty way
That emptied the Three Prisoners on the island
And all their bothers. And the queerest thing
About the ship—

AEDH and BRIGID. Which ship?

BLANAD. I'm telling you—

AEDH.

Was it the first ship?

BRIGID. Or the second ship?

BLANAD.

There is no first or second. Could there be
Two ships on the Seven Seas could learn that
trick

Of Druid magic? And the queerest thing,
As I was saying, was, the farther away
It sailed, and smaller grew, the nearer it came,
Until it seemed to glide into my eye.
And I declare to all the Gods at once
I feel it sailing round inside my head!

BRIGID (*infected by the fantasy*).

I feel the waves in mine!

AEDH (*also infected*). I smell the wind!

BLANAD (*with revelation*).

I think that something magical has come
Into this island, and, before we know

And things that have more body to them than talk.

BRIGID. -

Making the jail a soft hotel!

AEDH. That's so—

And that's a grand idea. If you want
To have a quiet and an easy job
At jailing sons of kings, make them believe
They're in a High King's hostel. Then the smiths
Of the Seven Kings may take a holiday
From sweating at the anvil forging bars
And filing locks and keys and chains.

BRIGID (*sceptically*). And then,

Before a day went past, wouldn't every man
Go round committing this and that offence?
And they that hadn't the spunk to break a head,
Or even a law, would swagger about the world
Parading what great criminals they were—
And all to get nice quarters in your jail:
A fine state of affairs!

(*The spreading of rushes and readying of foodstuffs
are now forgotten in the argument*).

AEDH. Why wouldn't it be

A fine state of affairs? with each one doing
The thing he's told the time he's told to do it:
Rising at six; skilly, six-thirty; seven,
Stone-breaking and other kinds of exercise:
No waste, no quarrels, no "each-man-for-himself"
That rouses all the trouble in the world.

BRIGID (*sarcastically*).

A grand idea—if only it would work.

AEDH.

And what's to hinder it?

BRIGID (*with finality*). If everyone

Does what he's told the time he's told to do it,

Then who's to tell them what to do, and when?

AEDH (*speculatively*).

Maybe the telling comes from somewhere else.

BLANAD (*reinforcing her sister*).

And more than that, how long would they be
pleased

To be so regular and industrious,

And most of them transported from that Eiré

Beyond where sea and sky meet, where a man

That had been peaceable for seven days

Would find himself hauled up before a king

To see what was the matter with his health?

BRIGID (*rubbing it in*).

Before a week was out they'd call a meeting,

Set up a chief, and swear him loyalty;

And at the next some cross-grained nosey fellow

Would hint about the morals of the chief—

BLANAD (*ending the argument*).

And then, if you'd the gumption of the bard

That was our ancestor, you could begin

All over again the story of the Red Branch,

The stiff-lipped king, and Bricriu-bitter-tongue,

BRIGID (seeking relief in a previous matter.)

Maybe you'll tell us what it is you've seen
Between the Jailers and the Prisoners?

Sometimes I've unbeknownst come on a Jailer
Taking them bread and mead when they'd a right
To be digesting what they ate in plenty
Only an hour or two before.

BLANAD (*who has been reassembling her parcels while Brigid is rummaging in the chest*).

What's putting flesh on them!

At other times,

When they should be at work on some fool thing
Or other, I have seen another Jailer
Playing at hurley with them, skelping balls
Over the piece of grass-land in the mouth
Of Eochu's valley.

BRIGID (*stooped over the chest*).

So *that's* what's thinning them!

With one thing putting flesh on them, and one
Taking it off, it s likely they will keep
A good sound average appetite and girth.

And there's a Jailer nothing does but pluck
From meadows and from hedges and from ditches
Nosegays for them to smell; or get the braziers
And smiths, carvers in wood, and picture-makers,
To fashion every kind of useless knick-knack
That maybe has some purpose for the soul
But nothing for the body that I can see.

BRIGID (*presuming the end*).

Well, whether what you have reeled off your tongue
Is truth spun out of something you have heard
Or read, or something you have but imagined,
And all we have been through this afternoon
(Heads in the air, queer ships and Druid spells)
Was dreaming out of bed, I wouldn't wonder
If what is holding the Three Prisoners here,
And all the others in their huts and holes,
And us too, is a liking for the place.

AEDH.

And that's the worst imprisonment of all,
Putting a chain around you from inside,
Where no man's hand can reach it with a file.

BLANAD.

I must confess I like the place myself,
Even if sometimes I imagine it
As lying somewhere in between worse places
I've been in, dreaming on my left-hand side,
And better ones to come, when on my right
I'm busy sleeping.

It isn't things that happen that's important.
What *is* important is, what *made* them happen?
And what I want to know is the same thing
King Eochu Rond—

BLANAD. Him with the chain of gold
 Stuck in his yellow hair?

AEDH (*keeping his thread*). King Eochu Rond—

BRIGID.
 Him with the daughter that the gossips tell
 Is mad after Cuchulain?

AEDH (*holding tight*). —the same thing
 King Eochu Rond made such a wonder of,
 Asking day in day out of friend and foe,
 That he went mad on it—and maybe *it*
 Is the one thing in life worth going mad for,
 And that is this: What made the Sons of Dermait
 Desert their native land? Get behind *that*,
 And you will get behind a heap of knowledge,
 And maybe get to know why *we* are here
 Instead of somewhere else, or, better still,
 Why those Red Branchers and their funny ship
 Are ghosting round this island, or maybe on it.

BRIGID (*at the back door*).

 Time's up for talk, for here comes— Dagda guard
 us!

 I thought at first it was the Prisoners,
 But now it's them invaders from the ship.

BLANAD (*after a look through the door*).

Something has mazed your sight like what mazed
mine

A while ago. Sure it is no one else
But the Three Prisoners as large as life,
Crawling to rest after a tiresome day
Of doing nothing. Lucky it is for us
We have things readied for them, wholesome food
To cook and serve after the dusk has fallen.
(*She has gathered up her various parcels*).

BRIGID.

And rushes for their sleep on steady ground,
And cosy covers now the nights go chilly.
(*She has brought out of the chest three rolled-up
coverlets, one royal blue, one illuminated yellow,
one martial red, each having a beetle sown on it,
the heraldic sign of their ancestry from the Beetle
of Forgetfulness. She lays them out on the ground
side by side, with their heads to the wall*).

AEDH.

Blue, yellow and red, whatever that may mean,
And it means something.
(*He proceeds to light the fire with steel and flint*).

BRIGID (*who has gone to the door for another look out*).

Great Lugh! my sight has cleared!
It is the Prisoners, but the living image
Of them three voyagers!

BLANAD (*taking a critical look; not so sure as before*).

We had better ask

If they are what they look, or something else—

AEDH (*profoundly*). Thoughts of the Beetle of Forgetfulness—

BRIGID.

Or Red Branch heroes out for divilment.—

(*She has brought three pillows out of the chest, one blue, one yellow, one red, with three concentric rings on each end, the centre being its own colour, and the middle and outer ones being respectively, yellow and red, red and blue, blue and yellow. She places them against the wall at the head of their appropriate coverlets*).

AEDH.

—Or maybe all at once under their skins,
The same as you and me and everybody.
First ask yourself if *you* are what you look
Before you question *them*.

BRIGID.

I'll ask no question

For fear I get an answer past my skill
To answer back.

BLANAD.

Whoever they may be,

I wish them grand adventures in their sleep,
Hunting or being hunted—

AEDH.

And maybe finding

They're after their own tails.

BRIGID and BLANAD *take a hurried look out, and seeing something approaching of which they are not certain, go out by another door.*

AEDH *lights the torches with a flare from the fire, and with an occasional hurried look towards the door, chants:*

AEDH.

*At dusk with cold shivers my hair was curled,
As black-mantled Balor, black war in his eye,
Went frowning abroad like the king-of-the-world,
Till up speaks a star from the peak of the sky,*

*And says: "You're a mighty man, sir!
But there's many a head for many a crown.
When one goes sleeping, one leaves his bed.
And a dream can either go up or down."*

*Now riddle me that (as the riddler said),
Come riddle me that—*

*(At a sound as of someone about to enter the door
he makes a hasty exit by the other door).*

--if you can, sir!

V
THE CITY OF DREAMS

i

A bedroom in a Dublin lodging-house, dingily furnished with the rudiments of human necessity, and dimly lighted by a cracked, dusty and cob-webbed window. Over three beds, obviously occupied (7 a.m.), hang three male outfits that have seen better days, no doubt like their owners—though the same might not be said of their nights if, as AE was then writing in poetry, we could see through the disguise of sleep into their dream-world; for Dublin was then (say 1911) a City of Dreams.

A new day has come, a day that may or may not be better or worse than yesterday or many days before. But for the three down-and-outs there is always hope. Particularly there is a racial and traditional imagination that may help one or more of them to a job; on which subject the three have reached an agreement that the wisest employer of labour in Ireland (it was not then Eiré, though it had been so two thousand years or thereabouts before) would be the one who had the sense to see that their talents were essentially complementary, though differently expressed on the surface, and who engaged them in the same place at the same time for the same wages each. Their idea, however, had not been shared by

1

employers, who belonged then to the unimaginative minority. Their ideal unity was only maintained in unemployment.

In their comradeship of search for work the three have conferred pet-names on one another corresponding with their talents and such experience as has occasionally come their way; and by a twist of imagination have personalised mythical figures that the revival of Irish literature and drama in both the front and back streets of the City of Dreams, and sometimes of nightmares, had familiarised to high and low. First, their leader, because "his bark was worse than his bite," was entitled Dumb Dog as a modern equivalent of Cuchulain. "Dumb" was added because even the cheapest seats at dramas had learned that when the Hound was not engaged in heroic enterprises, he was "a dark, sad, silent man." Second was Horsey, who traced his imaginative ancestry to Laeg, the charioteer of Cuchulain. The occupation of Laeg's modern counterpart had undergone "an Irish promotion" from driving the famous pair of horses that Cuchulain had won for himself in well-known stories, Black Sanglain and the Grey of Macha: Horsey's ambition now aspired to nothing higher than pushing a hand-cart for sixpence; though he would not, if asked, have denied the ancient ability to handle a chariot if one could

be found outside the National Museum, or even inside it. Third was Lugaidh of the Stripes, who, because he could see three sides to every question, was elected High King of Eiré; and passed on his characteristics in the modern title of Double Shuffle. In certain groups of students of mythology who met in small rooms in side streets and listened to AE expounding cosmic laws through Celtic legend, there was the idea that Cuchulain, Laeg and Lugaidh, as written and sung of in the Bardic Tales, were personifications of the Will, the Intuition that carries the Will towards fulfilment, and the Mind that adjusts external details to the fulfilment—but no one paid any heed to them.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE emerges from sleep, raises himself in his bed on his elbow, clears his throat, which starts the others out of their dreams, and chants in a come-all-ye manner.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

*There once was a cabby who puffed out his chest,
And dressed himself up from head to feet,
And reckoned himself as good as the best,
Till up speaks a fool in O'Connell Street,
And says: "You're a speedy man, sir.
But look at your wheels for something to learn.
What's all your fine talk of goin' ahead
When half of each wheel is goin' astern."*

Now riddle me that (as the riddler said).

Come riddle me that, if you can, sir.

I dreamt a chanter sung that on a kerb,
And when I looked he wasn't to be seen.

DUMB DOG.

As likely as not the ghost of some old bard
Called back by all the talk of bygone times
Here, there and everywhere, night, noon and
morning.

HORSEY (*sitting up, in protest*).

Seen or unseen, chanter or chanting ghost,
That song hits hard at me and my profession
Of Ireland's famous charioteer. (*He gets out of
bed and takes down his ragged clothes from a
peg in the wall beside his bed. He manages to
get into the trousers. He inserts with difficulty
one arm into a sleeve of the coat. His attention
is caught by something. He discontinues the pro-
cess of robing and sniffs at the loose sleeve, criti-
cally, but not with displeasure*). That's funny!

DUMB DOG.

The scent of new-mown hay?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

Or primroses

Tied up in flower-shops in the month of April?

DUMB DOG (*wryly*):

Or Liffey at the ebb?

chanter, a singing mendicant. "The smell of the Liffey is one of the sights of Dublin," according to Oliver S. Gogarty.

HORSEY (*listening to the coat as well as smelling it*).

How can I tell

What smell is on it or not, with all your noise?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

Is it smelling with your ears you are?

HORSEY.

Why not?

The man whose smell is only in his nose

Smells nothing right.

DUMB DOG.

That's either sense or nonsense.

HORSEY.

Maybe it's both. And if I didn't know

I come of an ould ancient family

Some fairy cursed two thousand years ago

With twice the birth-gift of imagination

That other people get (I name no names),

I'd swear the perfume on me driving-coat

Was not a day younger than that same curse.

DUMB DOG (*remembering a performance in the Gaiety Theatre*).

"An ancient fish-like smell."

HORSEY.

Lord, no such luck!

I haven't smelt a fish for a week past

Except in baskets on the Ringsend Road.

(*Questions the coat again with nose and ear*).

This has me moidhered, like an ancient story

My mother used to tell me when a kid

Of rushes cut for kings to sleep upon,

/

(He flicks something off the coat).

That was a spider—and if signs are true,
And spiders bring the luck that people say,
I'll prophesy we'll have our fill of fish
Before this night. (*Struck by an idea*) Begob,
that's a good one!

About them wheels. Maybe there's something
more

Than blathera in what the chanter sung
About their going ahead and going astern.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*who, like Dumb Dog, is dressing*).

Sure if the upper half is going east
And the lower half is moving to the west,
Then, like the sum at school, one minus one
Leaves us with nothing, and we're going no-
where.

HORSEY.

Whoa! not so fast, mare! Maybe it might mean
We're going east and west at the one time.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

Now that's a brainy notion—twice at once.
And that reminds me of the hairy poet
Who keeps a flock of fairies in his yard,
Or maybe it's a garden, in Rathmines,
And paints their pictures for his friends, and
swears

hairy poet: AE, noted for his tawny mane and beard and "queer notions."

1
By Irish Gods that, when we fall asleep,
We waken up inside, cocked up on thrones,
Crowns on our heads and sceptres in our hands,
And order suns and moons and stars about.
And then we waken here, just as we were,
Or maybe a day farther on a road
That has its end beyond the Blasket Islands,
In Tir-na-n'Og or some such fairy place.

HORSEY (*who is getting into his reminiscences of boots*).
Sure anybody can be anything
When they're asleep. Sometimes I dream, myself,
That I'm as airy as a dandelion
And go ballooning through the windy heavens.

DUMB DOG.

Not in them brogues!

HORSEY (*with increasing enthusiasm over his thought*).
Why not? I saw a book
Marked two-dee on a hand-cart down the quays,
That showed a fellow wearing ne'er a stitch
Except a funny hat, and funnier still,
Two pair of wings stuck on his fancy shoes.
A spexy chap was standing by the cart,
One of them haw-haw lads of Trinity
That knows the divil and all. "Who's that?" says I.
"Hermes," says he, "the messenger of the Gods."

Blasket Islands, off the coast of Kerry, on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

two-dee: (2d.) twopence.

Trinity: Trinity College, Dublin.

"What Gods?" "The Gods of Greece." "Not Irish Gods?"

"The Gods of Greece were *Gods*: the Irish—pah!"

"Good Lord, all that!" says I. And suddenly
Something within my head went buzzing round,
And everything went shiny, and says I,

As if I was the Provost in a wax,

"Do *you* believe in wings stuck to your feet?"

He handed me two spear-heads from his eyes,
Like what the Red Branch used for arguments.

"No one outside a lunatic asylum
Believes such things: they are imagination."

"Are they?" says I. "Well, I'm outside, and I
Believe in wings not only on your feet
But on your shoulders." Then he ran away

As if he had forgotten an appointment,
And left me to talk out the thing alone . . .

"The men who made God's messengers were not
Born fools," says I, and not a soul at hand
But me and meself. "Him and his brainy kind
Are dazed and dark with this and that. But I,
I understand. My God! I *understand*.

And that's the sorest thing a man can do
When all the world is mad on sanity,
And heading for perdition just because
No one is crazy enough to shout the truth
That we *have* wings at shoulder and at heel,
But haven't got the spunk to spread them out—

Squinting with precious stones.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*snatching the crookéd poker from the empty fireside*). And here's a sceptre

Would stir a fire, if there was one to stir,
And men were not grey ash on a black hearth.

DUMB DOG *accepts the fantasy without remonstrance, as if it was not the first time for such an ebullition, and would not be the last.*

HORSEY.

Now order us about like a High King.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

Or like an ancient God.

(*They stand at attention on each side of Dumb Dog*).

DUMB DOG. And what's the use?

For you (*Horsey*) would rob the orders of all power
By guessing them before I gave the word.

And you (*Double Shuffle*) would mix them up so
thoroughly

With talk of this and that and then and now
That fogs the cranium with uncertainty.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*attempting justification*).

I think that's how the Lord Almighty feels

At the beginning and the end of things:

Fed up with doing nothing, like ourselves;

And then fed up with doing twice too much,

Sending this one to heaven, that one to hell—

DUMB DOG.

But most to purgatory.

HORSEY.

That's God's truth.

The crowd is always a half-hearted crature,
Lacking the spunk of a great sinner or saint
Who knows his mind, and walks straight to his
hob,

Or grabs his harp although he couldn't tell
"The Orange Lily" from "The Boys of Wexford."
*Three loud deliberate knocks on the door give them
a fright.*

VOICE (*outside, deep and determined*).

Hi! you! your time is up.

DUMB DOG (*echoing destiny, his eyes turned upwards*).

Our time is up!

That means three coffins and a funeral.

HORSEY (*addressing the door, which he does not care to
to open*).

How can our time be up, your reverence,
Your honour—or whatever you may be,
On earth or—elsewhere, and us three hefty men
That couldn't muster up enough bad health
To kill a mouse?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*respectfully argumentative*).

The notice is too short.

We're not prepared for flying off to heaven.

Orange Lily, etc.: popular Protestant and Catholic songs.

VOICE.

Prepared or not—ten minutes, and no more.

I can't make out the sense of what you're mumbling,

But get you out.

HORSEY (*to the others*). Plain English is no good.

Gaelic won't do. I'll try some Shakespeare on him.

(*He strikes a stagey posture out of gallery memories*).

"Art thou a spirit of health or goblin damned?"

(*Laughter is heard on the other side of the door*).

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

He thinks that's funny.

DUMB DOG.

Try another line.

HORSEY (*as before*).

"Be thine intents wicked or charitable?"

VOICE (*mixed with laughter*).

Begob I thought you lads were down-and-outs,

But now I think you're part of that same gang

Of woolly amateurs gone drama-mad

That's coming to play-act some ancient yarn

For local charities, and want this room

As soon as you are out.

HORSEY.

We are not actors,

We are plain truth.

VOICE.

Well, then, whatever you are,

Clear out of this.

gallery, cheapest part of a theatre.

DUMB DOG (*still in regalia*). That was a near escape
From premature demise, as the papers say.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*pondering*).

"For local charities." *We're* charities.

HORSEY.

But are we local? I often feel the moon
Under my feet instead of overhead.

DUMB DOG.

It's just as local on the sun or moon,
Once you are there, as on O'Connell Bridge. .
(*Makes as if going out*).

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

You can't go walking out in such a dress
Where all the fools that go about disguised
As brainy men would take you to be mad.

HORSEY (*removing the tin basin from Dumb Dog's
head*).

Or take you for a king who stole a crown—
Like most I learned at school.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*taking the quilt off Dumb Dog's
shoulders*). And what is more,

If you went strutting round the Phoenix Park
In royal togs, they'd take you for a hero
Of ancient Ireland come to dish the King,
And haul you up and jug you for sedition.
(*He puts the quilt back on the bed*).

O'Connell Bridge, across the Liffey in Dublin.

DUMB DOG (*relieved of his dignities*).

At any rate it's better to be modest,
At least outside, whatever pride's within.
(*He returns the poker with dignity to the fireplace*).
No man is manly who has not a dream
Such as, somewhere inside, he *is* a king.
And if he thinks about it long enough,
As like as not it will become the truth,
No matter if it only seems delusion
To them that God has cursed with baldy minds.
*The others have been fixing themselves up to go out
looking for work, Horsey having a confirmatory
and apparently satisfactory smell at his coat.*

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*to Dumb Dog*).

You don't appear to have any hurry on you
To go and look for honest work, like us.
(*Both he and Horsey are ready for the road, as
respectable as circumstances permit*).

DUMB DOG.

No honest work ever needs looking for.
Work looked for grows dishonest. Honest work
Looks for its worker, and mine must look for me.
But all the same I'll give it half a chance
To find an honest watchman for next to nothing.
(*He puts some final touches to his toilet*).

HORSEY.

If men turned honest, *you* would have no job,

Snoring and twitching at a blacksmith's fire
To frighten boys from stealing lucky shoes.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

But I'll say this; he takes his job so hard,
He even barks the time he's in his sleep.

DUMB DOG.

Thanks for the testimonial. I'd give the like
If you'd remind me of the year your hand
Was calloused by the handles of a cart,
For I've forgotten it.

HORSEY (*with growing excitement*). But I remember—

Side-cars and wagonettes, hand-carts and drays,
All kinds of vehicles and equipages;
Myself sometimes whip-cracking on a dickey;
Or split in two on a starved ass's back
When gathering turf in bogs of Connemara;
Or snug as a bug in a rug, tucked in a pram;—
Year behind year. And back behind all that,
So far behind it might be all a dream,
Horses and chariots, and a hullabaloo
West from Loch Rory to the County Sligo,
And back again. (*Rapt*) Whoa! whoa! my lovely
Grey,
And my Black Sanglain! Your names will be in
songs
Mothers will teach their sons, and mine will me.
Come on! we'll show them how to jump the sun

And tread the lightning's tail. Come on, Cuchulain!
*He throws open the door. A man enters carrying
a bundle of variegated cloths under an arm.*

THE THREE *draw back and drop into an out-of-
work posture; and sidle out; apparently satisfied
that the man is not an employer of watchmen,
charioteers or handy-men.*

THE MAN *closes the door; throws the bundle, that
might be an antique costume or two, under a bed,
and with a sigh says:*

Lord! this will be some day, slogging like blazes
In such a hole (the cheapest we can rent)
To get the crowd word-perfect for tonight.
I'll do my bit before the others come.

*He claps his hands twice, simulates the rising of
a curtain, and says:*

My name is Bricriu-bitter tongue.
I earned that piece of praise when young,
Because . . .

Because what?

*He fumbles in his pockets, and produces the
crumpled script of "Bricriu's Feast".*

A street in Dublin about 7 p.m. of the same day, dimly lighted by a gas-lamp.

The door to a public hall is in the background. A large poster beside the door depicts a chariot of ancient Ireland drawn by a black horse and a grey one, driven by a yellow-haired charioteer posed as if he knew he was the best one in the country. A stately warrior is seated in the chariot, apparently looking for fight and ready for it. Another warrior sits beside him. Passers-by who are becoming acquainted with the recently discovered theatrical possibilities of Irish legend will recognise these heroic figures as Cuchulain, the Red Branch champion, otherwise named the Hound of Uladh; Laeg, his friend and charioteer; and Lugaidh, his fighting companion.

The poster, to those close up to it, announces the first-night of a new drama, "Bricriu's Feast," by an amateur company, "for local charities."

DUMB DOG enters as if looking for something, possibly work. He stops for a moment in front of the poster, seems to be annoyed by it, and comes forward growling.

DUMB DOG.

Cuchulain, Laeg, Lugaidh, as large as life.

Well, "all the world's a stage," as Shakespeare says.

And that means all the world is one great sham,
With no one getting nearer the God's truth.

But that is not the silly actors' fault.

The fault lies all with them that write their plays.

They hear the inside drama upside down,

And write it backside foremost. And no wonder

They and their world are heading for a mess!

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*who has entered and heard the last of the growl*).

Bow-wow! bow-wow! Conversing with yourself?

DUMB DOG.

For want of better company—asking the pardon
Of any that may be invisible

In heaven or hell, or on the earth.

HORSEY (*who has followed Double Shuffle*). And now

You've got the best that money couldn't buy.

So say your story. Any kind of luck?

DUMB DOG.

Luck? I've had luck at every step—*bad* luck!

And that's as good as good luck in the end,

Just as you take it. Any luck yourselves?

HORSEY.

Not yet—but still there's hope.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

He pins his faith

To that fat spider on his "driving coat."

DUMB DOG.

Spiders and shabby driving coats and faith
All have their place. What puts me in a sweat
Is not the earning nothing, but *doing* nothing,
And I bung-full of will and energy.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

I tell you what, if I was King of Ireland,
And not enough of work was going round,
I'd order a revival of religion,
And send five men in ten to monasteries,
Where they could eat and drink for next to nothing,
And do some work, and save shoemakers' bills,
And leave the decent sinners to do the rest,
And maybe find *it* was religion too.

DUMB DOG (*continuing his own thought*).

Maybe these actor fellows and their peep-show
Are not far wrong in giving simple fools
Something that's nothing and that takes them
nowhere,
But keeps them thinking they are doing something.
I've half a mind to see the play inside
If I could prove I was a "local charity."

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

Cripe! this must be where that glum amature
That scared us out this morning is on show.
If we could find him he might do the trick
As compensation for disturbing us.
(*He goes towards the door of the hall*).

HORSEY (*following him, attracted by the poster*).

Lord! "Bricriu's Feast" . . . "for local charities!"

Cuchulain, Laeg, Lugaidh, dressed up to kill!

Unless my memory has gone to pot,

There was no room for cringing charities

On Bricriu's bitter tongue. His royal feast

Was laid for proven heroes. Those were days!

And they would come once more if three stout
men

Had only will and sense and knack enough

To drop the mean disguise of daily life,

And be the heroes of their maddest dreams.

Who says the Red Branch withered, says a lie!

Come on, my Grey! Come, Sanglain! Come,
Cuchulain!

We'll take the Connacht road for mighty deeds!

We'll shiver their timbers like the walls of
Cruachan!

(*He has reached a climax of loud excitement*).

A POLICEMAN *enters on the largest available feet and with a useful weight for a tug-of-war. He moves with a solidity that is inconsistent with the alertness of his eye.*

POLICEMAN.

Now then, move on, and not disturb the peace.

DUMB DOG (*indicating Horsey who has subsided*).

Don't mind that lad. He gets that way some-
times

With ancient stories that his mother taught him.
DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*ingratiatingly*).

We want to see the play that's on inside.

POLICEMAN (*sizing them up, with scornful humour*).

That would be wasting cash, and you yourselves
Three holy shows. Why, if you got a stage,
Or three soap-boxes (like the Suffragettes),
Or just stood up, and never said a word
(*Not* like the Suffragettes), you'd draw a crowd
And make a fortune.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE. That's a shiny notion! "

DUMB DOG.

Our thanks to you—Head Constable.

POLICEMAN. Don't mention it.

But no promotion comes till duty's done.
I know you boys. I've juggled your kind before.
Come here under this lamp and say your name,
Address and occupation (*note-book ready*).

HORSEY (*has an idea*). Our stage-names, Sergeant?

You said we were a show, and you said right.
Sometimes we are the Sons of Doel Dermait
That scholars read of in their histories;
The lads that lost their home and found a jail.

POLICEMAN (*appraising them with a legal eye*).

I wouldn't be surprised if history
Was going to repeat itself.

HORSEY (*diverting danger*). But *now*

We are three noble knights of the Red Branch,

On an immortal foray; and after that,
Trying to find out why we left our home
The time we were the Sons of Doel Dermait.
Our leader (*indicating Dumb Dog*) is the famous
Hound of Uladh;
The greatest hero brought up in Dundalk,
Or Galway, Derry, Limerick, Belfast,
Waterford, Skibbereen or Enniscorthy.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*painting the lily*).

You should have seen him crowned and robed and
sceptred

At dawn of day.

POLICEMAN (*suspicious*). Indeed? And may I ask
Was *that* just in your heads?

DUMB DOG. It was plain truth;
A crown, a robe, a sceptre.

POLICEMAN (*suspicion confirmed*). Then that foray
Is finished with, not starting, and maybe now
Them three King's sons are heading for Mountjoy,
Where they'll have time to think out a new play
To answer their own question.

HORSEY. And how long
Might that be, Constable?

POLICEMAN. Five years . . . or ten. . .
Or maybe less if one of them should turn
King's evidence.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE. And *he* would get a pardon?

Mountjoy, a prison in Dublin.

POLICEMAN.

I'll say he would. So now lads, toss a penny
And find out which.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE. If you will lend us one.
And what would we be pardoned for?

POLICEMAN (*moidhered*). God knows. . .
"Loitering with intent. . ."

DOUBLE SHUFFLE. But you have said
The foray's finished.

DUMB DOG. There we differ from you.
That foray, with all respect, is never finished.

POLICEMAN (*not knowing where he is, but clutching*).
Then where's that crown and sceptre and that robe
You wore this morning? (*sarcastically*) Maybe
they were lent
By Dublin Castle.

DUMB DOG (*with a touch of bravado*). Maybe they were
not lent.

POLICEMAN.
That's not King's eviden . . . t's a confession.
(*He tries to make notes*).

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.
And what is more, we left them where we got them.

POLICEMAN (*astonished*).
And where was that now? (*notebook ready*).

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*dramatically*). The robe is on the
bed. . .

HORSEY (*rhetorically*).

The crown is on the table.

DUMB DOG (*ceremonially*). And the sceptre
Is in the fireplace.

POLICEMAN (*notetaking hopeless*). I wonder are you
rogues
Or simply lunatics?

HORSEY. You'll know the answer
If you will let us say our little scene
Out of our play.

(*He pushes the Policeman into a suitable position;
and places Dumb Dog in the centre with himself
and Double Shuffle on each side of him*).

POLICEMAN (*indignant at the impudence*). Damn you!
(*but relenting in the hope of information emerg-*
ing) Well, say the plot.
I can't stand here all night.

DUMB DOG. Then take a seat.

POLICEMAN (*losing patience at suspected scorn for law*).
I'll take you lads straight down to College Street,
And put you where I put three other playboys
That went about nosing in this and that,
Intent upon some felony.

HORSEY (*excited*). It's *them*!
It's the Three exiled Sons of Doel Dermait!
We'll find now why they left their native land!
(*He makes to go and take the others with him*).

POLICEMAN (*drawing his baton to frustrate what he takes to be an expedient for escaping the law*).

And where do *I* come in?

HORSEY (*stage-managerially*). You just stay here,
Looking the part of Eochu Glass the jailer
Who kept the three King's Sons juggled on his
island.

You'll take the hisses when the curtain falls.

(He turns towards the poster at the door of the hall).

Come on, my lovely Grey! Come on, Black
Sanglain!

Come on, Cuchulain!

THE POLICEMAN *bars their exit.*

A STRANGER *has entered opposite, and shows the approval of a dramatic connoisseur at the delivery of the last lines.*

STRANGER. What, the play's open-air!
I thought it was inside (*indicating the hall*).

HORSEY (*ecstatically*). It's everywhere!

Outside and inside, on the sun and moon,
In Dublin and New York and Timbuctoo,
And all the time, and free to everyone!

POLICEMAN (*explanatorily, to the Stranger*).

He's balmy on the crumpet.

STRANGER. It may be so;
But sometimes there is more than mere horse sense
Comes from God's fools. And what harm are they
doing? . .

Apparently rehearsing for a play?
Believe me, Constable, that men who talk
Of Dublin and New York and Timbuctoo,
Outside and inside, and the sun and moon,
Don't go around committing mortal sin.
It's only men with local minds do that.
It's my belief they're only fooling you
With poetry.

POLICEMAN. Are they then? Poetry,
If it obstructs an officer on duty,
Is just as criminal before the law
As anything that's solid.

STRANGER. More, I'd say:
It's rank sedition—cutting at the jobs
Of magistrates and peelers; for if men
Lived poetry there'd be no need for law.

POLICEMAN.
And what about the women? They're the divil,
Glass-breaking, post-box-painting, God knows
what!
Provoking men to print the solemn warning:
"Beware the Skeffys and their northern Cousins!"

STRANGER.
Women are not mere poets; they are poetry.
The Greeks knew that: they called the Mother
of Song
Euterpe. And AE says, in the East
The Hindus call the same Saràswati.

And in the Ireland that is being reborn
They called her Dana, mother of the Gods.
Her husband, Dagda, played a magic harp.
And Lugh, their son, was master of all crafts.
He had an earthly son, by name Cuchulain,
Whose deeds, they say, were nothing to his songs,
Because his deeds fell on the heads of men,
But in his songs he stretched into the sky.
The mention of Cuchulain stirs the others.
A police whistle sounds in the distance.

POLICEMAN (*adjusting himself for emergencies*).

Talk of the devil—it's them Suffragettes!
Pretending they're as civilised as men!

STRANGER.

A constable has duties, not opinions.
Those women are the future. When they're done,
They'll make men *men*. But that might be a pity.
Lifting the valleys to the mountains' heights
Might lower the mountains. Yet, who knows,
who knows?

There may be other mountain-peaks beyond.
(*Police whistle sounds nearer*).

More Suffragettes! You've got your hands full.

Run—

And I'll go bail for these three gentlemen.

The POLICEMAN goes off with a scrutinising and threatening look at the three, who appropriately shiver—and smile at his important back-view.

STRANGER (*assuming a confidential air, perhaps covering a suspicion that he cannot quite diagnose*).

Now tell me, boys, what is the gag? Trust me.

I'm just as keen as you on ancient lore.

HORSEY (*mysteriously*).

The honest truth, sir, is, our search for work

As watchman, charioteer, or handy-man,

Covers a deeper search.

The STRANGER accepts the statement with assumed seriousness.

DUMB DOG (*realistically*). Something to do

Is search enough for me. It's gnawing your nails

And little else, that gives a man queer dreams,

And sometimes turns him looney (*indicating Horsey*).

HORSEY.

Don't you believe him.

He's just as mad as I am.

STRANGER (*accepting the truth: to Double Shuffle*).

And you, sir?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

Say half and half.

STRANGER (*chuckling at an idea*).

Now that's a brilliant thought!

I think if each would drink a "half-and-half"

(With something solid—I'm for temperance),

half-and-half: a mild alcoholic mixture.

You'd find the thing you want, or else forget it,
And that's the same as finding it, *pro tem*.
(*General agreement from the three on the idea,
but financial considerations interfere*).

I meant to take a seat at one-and-six
To see this play for local charities.
But you have given me enough and more
To think about for weeks. And now, my sons,
Hold out your hands. (*They do so, with a pre-
liminary rub on their clothes, and surprise that is
not quite certain*).

That's yours . . . and yours . . . and yours. (*He
puts what they take to be a sixpence in the hand
of each*).

DUMB DOG (*so moved that he does not inspect his
sixpence*).

You'd miss the play for us?

STRANGER.

Well, what of that!

There's plays *go leor*. Sure Dublin's all a play.
It was yourself (*to Horsey*) said it was every-
where.

And after all, what's a poor imitation
When something in you touches or is touched
By the essential drama of the world,
That's good or bad as much as it reflects
A greater Drama.

HORSEY. Great Scott! He's talking sense!

go leor (galore); plenty.

Where did you learn it?

STRANGER.

Some comes from myself.

Some comes from pondering the bardic lore

Helped by the vision of AE and Yeats.

In fact, instead of sitting through this play,

I'll spend an hour at the Hermetic room

Watching AE waving his delicate hand

And wallowing in endless eloquence;

Making the wisdom of the universe

So plain and beautiful that common people

Don't care a thraneen for it: all they want

Is beef and beer. Well, here's a little book

(*producing it from his pocket and handing it to Dumb Dog*).

May give you pleasure with its gathering

Of songs and stories, good and bad and middling,

Some from beyond this world, the rest from Ireland.

So, brothers, *slawn a wallye*.

THE THREE (*more or less together*): *Bannacht lath*.

THE STRANGER *goes away*.

DUMB DOG *gets into the book, as the others watch the donor disappear in the distance*.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

Now *what was that?*

Hermetic, a society of which AE was the chief figure.

slawn a wallye: safe home.

bannacht lath: blessing go with you.

‘DUMB DOG (*snappishly*). Nothing. Listen to this.

(He gets light by turning the book at an angle to the lamp).

A song of Phil MacCool and the Spanish Giant.

Come all ye chesty Ulster boys,
And quit your drumming and fifeing noise,
And songs that date all historee
From the year one six nine nought A.D.,
And listen to my lay.
I'll give you a song from the County Kerry,
Not half as loud but twice as merry,
And maybe with something not learned at school,
About the hero Phil MacCool—
With a fol-de-rol-de-ray.

He gives the book to HORSEY who continues.

There once was a giant who lived in Spain,
Who was large in body but small in brain.
He couldn't stand the poets' boasts
Of Phil and his famous Fenian hosts
That jarred him night and day.
So he grabbed a shield and a brace of spears
That would arm a platoon of Fusiliers.
And says he: "I'll wade across that pool
And test this talk about Phil MacCool" -
With a fol-de-rol-de-ray.

HORSEY *passes the book to* DOUBLE SHUFFLE *who continues the reading of the song.*

1690 A.D.: The Battle of the Boyne.

Now Phil was gifted with second sight.
So he broke the news to herself that night.
Says Phil: "He needn't paddle so far
To find that things are not as they are
In life's preposterous play.
If strength to strength we cannot pit,
We can give him a taste of Irish wit.
So set your head to work, me jool."
"Me hand on me heart," says Mrs. MacCool—
With a fol-de-rol-de-ray.

(They repeat the refrain in chorus).

A window has been raised on the upper storey of the hall. A head comes out evidently to protest against the row in the street. It is the head of the amateur ACTOR of the previous scene, made up as Bricriu-bitter-tongue for the play for local charities. Before he can utter his protest, DUMB DOG has taken the book and begun the next stanza of the come-all-ye. The ACTOR listens with growing enthusiasm, but unseen by the Three.

DUMB DOG reads.

The giant stepped on land at Ventry
Where Mrs. MacCool was doing sentry.
Says she: "You are welcome from over the water,
Though himself is beyant at a terrible slaughter
On the strand at Dingle Bay.
But mebbe you'll ate a bit of his cake
That out of sand and rocks I bake?"

jool: jewel.

Thinks he, "His muscles must be crool
If that is the diet of Phil MacCool!"---

With a fol-de-rol-de-ray.

(All, including the actor, repeat the refrain).

HORSEY *reads*.

"Is there aught in the cradle within?" quo' he.

"The youngest of God-knows-how-many," shi she.

And giant or man from north or south

Must fondle a teething baby's mouth

And "ootlums tootlums" say.

But there came a sound like a poacher's trap,

And a giant finger left with a snap.

Says he, "Have you any cotton-wool?"

Bad luck to the brat of Phil MacCool!"—

With a fol-de-rol-de-ray. (*As before*).

DOUBLE SHUFFLE *reads*.

And says he, "If their childer is so uncivil,

Their men must be the very divil!"

So with nine whole fingers (including thumbs), from

Ventry he wades to the place he comes from

At the dawn of the following day.

This tale has no moral, as far as I know.

But, moral or none, it serves to show

That a man may be big, and as a big a fool;

For *the kid in the cradle was Phil MacCool!*"

With a fol-de-rol, fol-de-rol, fol-de-rol-de-ray.

THE THREE *are proceeding to go off to spend their
sixpences, as hunger is more immediately pressing*

crool: cruel. quo'he—quoth he. shi she—says she.

than seeing a play, but they are held up by a voice.[^]

VOICE (*overhead*).

My stars! what acting! Are you the Fays' bright
lads

That stretch their voices to the firmament
Rehearsing at Bride's Glen or Sandymount,
Or telling the seagulls at the Shelly Banks
About Prince Connla of the Golden Hair?

DUMB DOG (*retreating with the others into shadow*).

We're not a play. We are reality.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

Or maybe we *are* a play. It all depends
On whether you are facing east or west,
Or looking out or in. Whatever is,
We are the opposite, we are the balance.

HORSEY.

To you who make your world out of pretence,
We are our world's hunger and homelessness,
Hunting the answer to a score of questions
That maybe have no answer in words, but only
In blood and blazes. Yet we have the notion
Could we but find the answer to one question,
We would have every other in our hand.

ACTOR.

What question might that be?

Frank and William Fay were the heads of the first Irish dramatic company.

DUMB DOG. Why the Three Sons
Of Doel Dermait left their native land.

ACTOR (*with a laugh*).

Well, first I thought you were sane. Then in a turn

I thought you were off your rockers. Now, begob!
Hearing you take the words out of my mouth
That are the pivot of our play tonight
Made on an ancient story of the Red Branch,
I'm all at sea thinking you may be both;
And that's a much more complicated state
Than being simply sane or simply cracked.

HORSEY.

Whoa! no step further, or you'll hit the secret.

ACTOR.

What secret's that?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE. That secret can't be told
On empty stomachs.

ACTOR (*seeing the point*). *That's sheer sanity.*

And *my* turn comes to be a simple fool

And dock receipts for local charities.

(He fumbles in a pocket under his costume and throws a coin to each).

Here, catch! one . . . two . . . three . . . Now
to Bricriu's Feast,

And let the best man have the biggest share,

And bring me back the secret afterwards.

THE THREE *come into clear light under the lamp and pick up a coin each which they presume to be sixpences.*

ACTOR.

Gosh! am I seeing things? We've met before!

HORSEY (*with a touch of drama*).

And we shall meet again.

ACTOR (*responding dramatically*). "At Philippi."

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

. At Philippi? Where should the Red Branch meet,
Cuchulain, Laeg, Lugaidh, (*indicating*) and now
Bricriu (*indicating the actor*),

But—

DUMB DOG. Emain Macha.

ACTOR. That's the very spot.

At Emain Macha: the password . . .

ALL TOGETHER (*right hands raised*). Emain Macha!

THE THREE *go off ceremoniously, each displaying a coin in each hand, HORSEY first, tugging at a pair of imaginary reins; DUMB DOG and DOUBLE SHUFFLE following, trying to look as heroic as possible.*

THE ACTOR *looks after them until they disappear. Lines from his part as Bricriu-bitter-tongue come into his head, and on to his lips.*

Set round my ready table see

The proud Ultonian chivalry . . .

(He laughs at the quaint juxtaposition of ideas).

Begob that's funny! *(He has a flash)* I wonder
is it funny.

I wonder if, somewhere behind the play,

We are what we assume. Lord! that's a thought!

(Immersed in the thought he lowers the window).

The same bedroom as at first. Night (10.30 o'clock) made visible by a candle. For a moment the room is empty. Then. . .

HORSEY (*opening the door gingerly from outside, and putting his head inside and peering searchingly in all directions*).

Well, here we are again. God save all here.

DUMB DOG (*heard but not seen, simulating law and order*).

Move on now. You're obstructing the thoroughfare.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*also outside*).

Afraid of Suffragettes?

HORSEY (*coming into the room, followed by the others*).

I'm not afraid

Of anything that walks in flesh and blood.

Them I can keep outside of me. But ghosts

And leprechauns give me cowl'd-water shivers

For fear they might slide in under my skin.

If you forget the ghost was here this morning

I don't—and I'll go bail he'll walk this night.

(*He turns the key in the inside of the door*).

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

You're balmy. That's the fellow in the play

Who scatters tanners like a moulting tree.

This very minute he's still acting Bricriu.
 Could he be here and there at the same time?

HORSEY.

 He might—and might not. But the point is this:
 A day that started at financial scratch,
 And ends with three square meals in three round
 holes,
 And all because a spider in the morning
 Perambulated on me drivin'-coat—

DUMB DOG.

 That's superstition. It was wit that did it.

HORSEY.

 And wit or no wit, what is superstition
 But truth that has been carried to extreme?

DUMB DOG.

 Who told you that?

HORSEY.

 Nobody told me that,
 Barring myself. But, as I was remarking,
 A day like that might end up anyhow;
 And it's much better to be sure than sorry.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

 It started in the air with crown and robe
 And throne and sceptre and all.

HORSEY.

 That's true for you.
 And here it ends full up of Bricriu's feast.
 And we three heroes of the Red Branch, we,
 (Shades of my mother's brass-rimmed spectacles!)
 Starting a library at Emain Macha!

*(He displays the book given by the Stranger).
Nice bed-time book. (Hands it to DOUBLE
SHUFFLE). Give us another story.*

*(He takes off his coat and hangs it on a nail in deep
shadow behind the beds, then sits on one of them).*

DOUBLE SHUFFLE *turns over the leaves, but does not
find anything to his taste. He hands the book to
DUMB DOG, hangs his coat on another nail in the
shadow, and sits on a bed.*

DUMB DOG *does not bother to look for anything to read.
He hands the book back to HORSEY, hangs up his
coat and sits on the other bed.*

HORSEY *accepts the inevitable, closes his eyes, lets the
book open of itself, and reads, adjusting the candle.*

THE DOWNFALL OF KING BRESS

Come all ye Irish from north and south,
And hark to the story that's burnin' me mouth.
It's the ancient tale of Bress the Fomorian
Who ruled over Ireland in accents stentorian.
On the first hint of freedom by sea or by land,
He putt down his futt with a heavy hand.
But his title to fame in each principality
Was his want of Irish hospitality.
For the length of his reign no chiefs or their wives
At the High King's table had greased their knives.
And never a bard could chant a deed
Inspired by the sparkle of royal mead.

No matter how knacky or subtle or quick
In hand or eye was a juggler's trick,
At the court of King Bress he could never show it;
And never was heard the voice of a poet
Or sound of pipes or harp or horn
From drowsy night to bleary morn.
And the people shrunk in humilitee
At having to stomach a stingy Ard Righ.

DUMB DOG (*in the rhythm of the poem*).

And nayther could we.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*similarly*). And nayther could we.

HORSEY (*too immersed to do more than nod agreement*).

Now Bress was the kind that could stand no rivalry,
But opposed it with every kind of divilry.
And, what is worse, he forgot his betters,
And insulted the men of learning and letters
From Ireland's Eye to Innisboffin.
But he straddled his high horse once too often.
One evening there came to his court a filly—

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

God bless your horsey mind! pronounce it *fee'lay*.
It's not a young mare. It's an Irish poet
Who, strange to say, writes poetry in Irish,
And English of a sort. I have by heart
A thing I once wrote down in County Kerry.

*There was a lad that lived in Ventry,
And druv an ass to the fair at Dingle,
And thought he'd imitate the gentry*

Ireland's Eye, etc.; small islands east and west of Eiré.

*When coin in his pocket began to jingle,
But when his cheeks grew red and tinglish,
And in his eye was something fireish,
His tongue forgot to talk in English,
And fell back on its native Irish.*

HORSEY (*not to be diverted*).

Well this arrival at the court of Bress
Was maybe one like that.

DUMB DOG.

Drive on and see.

HORSEY (*continuing*).

One evening there came to the court a filé
Whose mouth was neither sugared nor mealy,
But double-dosed with power to freeze
Or burn or blast his enemees.
For his mother Etain, though few may know it,
At the court of the Dananns was famed as a poet,
And transmitted her skill in nounry and verbry
To her son and heir, whose name was Cairbre.
You could tell by the shine on his hairless face
That he came of the Godly Danann race.
He slid through the air over stream and meadow,
And, sunlight or moonlight, he cast no shadow.
But Bress was too busy with tyranees
To notice trifling details like these.
So he bundled the bard in a ricketty room
That was furnished with nothing but cobwebs and gloom.
And after a while, when it suited himself,
He sent him a meal without kitchen or delf:
Three puny cakes so wizened and hard

They stuck in his thrapple and choked the bard,
Till he coughed the crumbs to the rafters and spluttered
The very first satire in Ireland uttered.

*May Bress when hungry find a dish
That offers neither meat nor fish.
When thirsty may he never quaff
The milk that feeds the growing calf.
May never wall or roof rain-tight
Shelter him from gloomy night.
And, worst of all, may never he
Be cheered by bard or shanachie.
Be this the fate of the tyrant Bress,
No more—and certainly no less.*

DUMB DOG.

That was no curse, giving him what he'd got
In his own dried-up sowl, if he had one.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

A deal depends on how you say a curse;
I mean, what language. I heard a Wicklow man
Give out he wouldn't curse a man in English
Because there is some venom in that speech
Might bring out blisters on him. But, says he,
"You could go cursing him from dawn to dark
In Irish till the both ends of your mouth
Were bubbling foam, and at the end of day
You'd have your stomachful of satisfaction,
And he no harm on him at all at all."

HORSEY (*who has been looking ahead in the poem*). ‘‘

Well, whether Bress was cursed in English or Irish,
It worked, for this is how the story goes:

Then the people of Dana, whose courage had shrunk
To the size of a rabbit's, got back their spunk
When they saw a poet put up his fists
To the blackavised thief who had emptied their kists.
So they stiffened their lips and riz in revolt—
And the tyrant cleared off like a frightened colt.
For that is the way when the sowl is soured:
The bigger the bragger the bigger the coward.
And that is the story of Bress the Fomorian
That by right should be sung to a chant Gregorian
On account of the sermon it preaches pat
To the fellow whose head is too big for his hat.
But the principal moral is aisy to see:
They couldn't stomach a stingy Ard Righ.

(The Three have responded with increasing emphasis to the rhythm and rhyme of the poem).

DUMB DOG.

And nayther could we!

DOUBLE SHUFFLE. And nayther could we!

ALL (*emphasising the stressed syllables with three bangs on anything near at hand*).

And nayther, begob, could we!

They are apparently answered by three slow knocks from somewhere.

There is awed silence for a moment.

HORSEY (*in a ghostly voice, surveying the ceiling or somewhere beyond it*).

That's spirit-rapping!

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*awed but realistic*).

Too much beef behind it

In my opinion.

DUMB DOG. Why not ask the door?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE *turns the key and gingerly opens the door.*

POLICEMAN (*the same one, but in mufti, entering with a knowing smile*).

Retiring, gentlemen? Pardon intrusion.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

O my prophetic soul, the constable!

I know him by his face and by his boots.

POLICEMAN (*intent on duty*).

I just dropped up to ask some information

On ancient coinage. You're authorities

Unless I'm misinformed.

HORSEY. Now he is dotty!

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*showing the Policeman the book of songs*).

It's true we've just begun a library,

But hadn't got as far as (*seeking a word*)

"new". . .

POLICEMAN (*momentarily falling from duty, obliging*).

"—mismatics."

HORSEY (*seeking inner light*).

Coins? Ancient coins! and us rank amateurs
At modern ones!

POLICEMAN (*with official sarcasm, though appreciating his own wit*). Well now, ancient or modern,
You *might* be "pros" at moving them around
Like thimbles and a pay. But anyhow,
It's not a matter now for argument.
Just come around and see the nice young lady
You paid your bill to at the restyourant.
She's at the station perishing to meet you,
Although the hour is late and the night cold.
I think ye were so moidhered with her looks,
And she was so bamboozled with yer looking,
Three such admirers simultaneously---

HORSEY (*correcting politely but firmly*).

Three Red Branch chiefs at Bricriu's royal feast—

POLICEMAN (*sticking to business*).

—That three bad sixpences got in her till.
Well, not plain *bad*, but not in circulation
Since Concubine or some such lad was king.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*ruefully*).

It seems to me our play's gone off its beat.

HORSEY.

Maybe not so far off. Maybe that girl
Is in it too.

pros: professionals. *thimbles and a pea*: a game of chance.

POLICEMAN. One of the soap-box troupe!

What part now would you give her in your play?

HORSEY (*in the clouds beyond the ceiling*).

She got her part two thousand years ago,
Or maybe six, the time the world was made,
If not before.

POLICEMAN (*incredulous, but still indulging*).

With what has happened since,
The Boyne, Home Rule, the Suffragettes and all,
It's likely she's forgot it.

HORSEY (*all alive*). Has she then ?

If you had shared, like us, in Bricriu's feast,
You might have seen the way she eyed the Hound
As if his face was troubling her—

POLICEMAN (*glancing at Dumb Dog*). It would.

HORSEY (*momentarily resenting a slight on a pal*).

I'm telling you, as if Cuchulain's face
Was in a dream or in some ancient song.
(*Gets in idea*) I have it, Oh! I have it. She is
Findchoem!

*The OTHERS consider the discovery and signal
acceptance.*

*The POLICEMAN scents some possible information,
relevant or otherwise, and produces his notebook.*

POLICEMAN.

And who is this Miss Finecomb, may I ask?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*meeting aspersion*).

Mrs.—not Miss. Could such a girl go single?

HORSEY (*making things clear*).

The one that tried to lure him from his wife.

POLICEMAN.

Too many hims and hers in this for sense:

(*Emphatically*) Lured who?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*surprised at obtuseness*).

Cuchulain — him.

POLICEMAN (*mixed, but faithful to duty*). And when
did you (*to Dumb Dog*)

. Get married, eh?

DUMB DOG. Two thousand years ago,
Or maybe six, the time the world was made,
If not before.

HORSEY (*delighted*). Oh! that's the way to talk!
Now rub them in: Emer, that dacent woman,
One of the darning, dusting, cooking sort---

POLICEMAN.

Not shouting for a vote?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*after a second's thought, inventively*).

She had *two* votes,
Because she was twice as good as any man,
Barring Cuchulain—at least that's what she said;
And if she didn't, well, it's just as true.

HORSEY (*undeflected*).

—And Fand, that he denies, because her husband
Shook his forgetting-cloak between the two.

POLICEMAN (*trying hard to follow*).

Her husband? (*Noting*) A bad lot you are I'm thinking.

HORSEY (*absorbed in legend*).

—And there was Aoife, ginger and jealousy,
Who bound their son with an unholy vow
To kill his father—

POLICEMAN (*gripping something tangible*).

Aha! when was *he* born?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

Father, or son?

POLICEMAN. This son that's being reared
To kill his father.—And who is the said father?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*riled and superior*).

Why *him*, Cuchulain!

POLICEMAN (*taking legend for fact*).

When was this son born? (*To Dumb Dog*).

DUMB DOG (*innocently*).

Only *that* one?

POLICEMAN. You'll think him quite enough
When he has done with you. (*Rapping*) When
was he born?

DUMB DOG (*solemnly*).

Two thousand years ago, or maybe six—

POLICEMAN (*giving it up*).

Snakes! am I here . . . or where, or now . . .
or when?

I'm getting just as balmy as yourselves.

(*Mocking*) "Two thousand years ago, or maybe
six."

A few years more or less will hurt no one.
In any case he must be fairly old,
Too old, I'd think, to judge of anything
But his own end, not mentioning his father's.

HORSEY (*elsewhere*).

—And there was Findchoem of the fuzzy hair—

POLICEMAN (*more or less aside, his mind on the restaur-
ant girl*).

That fits *her* neat!

HORSEY. —and the marauding eye—

POLICEMAN (*still aside or nearly*).

"Marauding," that's the word!

HORSEY. —and the fine talk

That put the comither straight on Cuchulain.
And when she hinted at his mighty fame,
And said no man in Ireland equalled him
For strength or skill or looks or anything,
What could he do but give her his protection,
And she so full of brains and loveliness—
Two things the Hound of Uladh can't pass by.
So off they go to Emain via Cruachan—

POLICEMAN (*hand-up as if directing traffic*).

Stop now at that. I see daylight at last.
I know what you were making for, deceiving
That innocent young girl with Red Branch talk,

comither (come hither): fascination.

Trying to maze her mind with poetry,
The same as you tried mine a while ago.
And then when you had got her upside-down,
Her eyes all blurred with out-of-date romance
Instead of business, passed them coins on her—
(*Sentimentally*) And she an orphan maybe.

HORSEY (*half here, half there*). Findchoem's father
Is King of Connacht. That's no puny kingdom,
And he no common king that comes and goes,
But one that lives forever in a song—
Wearing a chain of gold stuck in his hair,
And putting a great curse upon Cuchulain
The time he took his daughter without asking,
Or, more correctly, when she asked Cuchulain,
A curse that he should find why the Three Sons
Of Doel Dermait left their native land.

DUMB DOG.

And that's why we are here—

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*indicating clothes*).—the way we
are—

DUMB DOG (*growling*).

Hunting and hunting—

DOUBLE SHUFFLE. —sometimes being hunted.

HORSEY.

—One day three Red Branch heroes on a quest.
Another day three Sons of Doel Dermait,
Our princely garments turned to common rags.

POLICEMAN (*desiring finality*).

You'd best make up your minds then what you
are

The time the station sergeant asks your names.

DUMB DOG.

The mind is not a thing to be made up.

Make up your *will*, and leave the mind alone

To be the will's obedient instrument.

HORSEY.

Sure it's the men whose minds have been made
up

That stop all progress, like the Sassenach

Who has decided he must run this island

Forever and ever—

POLICEMAN. Stop! That's rank sedition.

No more of that. One crime is quite enough

To stop you lads harming yourselves or others.

You passed three spurious coins on that young
girl,

And now the law must take its proper course.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*argumentatively*).

What is your evidence the coins were ours?

POLICEMAN (*not revealing official secrets*).

Oh, evidence *go leor*. You'll hear all that

Before the magistrate.

HORSEY (*thinking things out*). We paid the bill

In the three tanners Bricriu-bitter-tongue

Subscribed after he heard our famous piece

Entitled "Phil MacCool and the Spanish Giant."

POLICEMAN (*sceptically, with an eye to more evidence*).

You never looked at them or even bit them?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

We thought it was the proper thing to do

To pay for Bricriu's feast in Bricriu's coin.

DUMB DOG (*scornfully*).

Feast! Coffee . . . cakes . . .

POLICEMAN.

So that's the smell I get.

I thought it might be something a bit stronger,

HORSEY (*strung up*).

You get it too? You get that ancient smell

Of fresh-cut rushes for a royal bed?

I got it on my driving-coat this morning.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*sticking to his point*).

—And how could we, three knights of the Red
Branch,

Suspect a brother knight of forging coins?

And he, Bricriu, next thing to naked truth—

Save in your presence (*to the Policeman*).

HORSEY (*carried away*). I think that ancient smell

And them three ancient coins, come how they
may,

Are signs that something magical has touched

The world and us, and that the play has changed.

Eochu the Green may chain the three lost sons

Of Doel Dermait; but it was foretold

That Lugh's immortal son would liberate them;
And no one lives can break that prophecy.

POLICEMAN (*nearing the end of his patience*).

Well now, the time has passed for poetry.
The coins are yours, whatever way you got them.
And either they are passports to sedition
In a conspiracy against the Government,
Or the Museum will be missing them.
And either way it's now for College Street.

DUMB DOG (*indicating their inadequate costume*).

Not in this costume, sergeant?

POLICEMAN.

A good idea!

Where are your coats? (*They make a move as if
to get them, but he stops them with a threatening
gesture*). No, none of that, me boyos!

God knows what kind of ancient Irish weapons
Are in your pockets. Now I will be the waiter
To help three Red Branch chiefs into their cloaks!

He chuckles at his jest as he locks the door, pockets the key, and proceeds to get the coats, wherever they may happen to be in the dark background.

HORSEY.

Maybe its three King's Sons.

College Street: where a police station was.

POLICEMAN (*noticing the bundle thrown under a bed by the actor in the morning*). Well, that bates Banagher!

Not only passing spurious Irish coins,
But hiding stolen ancient Irish finery.

(*He brings into the candle-light a heap of gaudy stuff which resolves itself into three antique costumes apparently of similar character. He throws one of them, any one, to each of the THREE*).

Here! take your evidence along with you.
Get into them, me hearty three King's Sons,
And get back home to jail.

The THREE make an attempt to expostulate, but the POLICEMAN silences them with a gesture of command.

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*struggling into a robe*). Only the
jailed

Can taste the ecstasy of liberation.

HORSEY (*struggling into his*).

This beats the throne, the robe, the sceptre, flat!
Tanners of Conchubar and Red Branch togs!
I'm thinking Bricriu might explain all this.

DUMB DOG (*words fail him, in his costume*) . . .

POLICEMAN (*seeing them robed, but taking no chances*).

Now then, 'bout turn.

Banagher: a town that "bates the devil."

The THREE turn as if to the manner born. A scarab is seen embroidered on the back of each costume, but the THREE do not see them.

POLICEMAN (*satisfied that all is in order*).

'Bout turn. (*They turn*) Let you remember
This is no circus for the public view.

Down the *back stairs* you go, and no back chat.
A vehicle is waiting to drive you home.
(*He unlocks the door and is about to open it*).

HORSEY (*bemused*).

' There's vehicles, and vehicles. Who knows
But this one might fly off the solid earth,
Much like the Druid ship at Eochu's island
'That sailed three feet or four above the water.

DUMB DOG (*to Policeman*).

May I not speak with one of my two friends
Before our talk is turned to evidence?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*with a threatening glance at Horsey*).

Just one small question, sergeant?

POLICEMAN (*as a concession to the condemned*). Shove
it off you.

DUMB DOG (*to Horsey, with severity that might be simulated*).

Where is your lucky spider now?

DOUBLE SHUFFLE (*similarly*). And where's
The bounce that was to lift us to the sky?

HORSEY.

Some people are the very devil to plase!
"A jug of wine, a book of verse, and thou,"
Some poet says, "is all we need below."
My lucky spider brought us Bricriu's feast,
A book of Irish yarns and songs, and "thou"
Perched at a counter. And behold us three
Dressed up to kill. And in a two-horse chariot
We'll drive up to His Majesty's hotel,
The way we druv from Emain west to Cruachan,
And have a night's untroubled sleep for nix,
And in the sleep be all that we could wish—
Three Red Branch voyagers or Three King's Sons.
I ask you, mister, is it playing fair
To expect *one* spider to do more than that?

POLICEMAN.

No more sham looney. You're as sane as I am.
DUMB DOG (*solemnly, to the ceiling*).

The Lord forbid!

POLICEMAN (*at finality*). Shut up your ugly mugs,
And let you slip like ghosts down them back stairs.
Not a word more. Quick march, and then left turn.
THE THREE *file out*, DUMB DOG *first, then* HORSEY,
then DOUBLE SHUFFLE.

THE POLICEMAN *brings up the rear with a sense of responsibility*.

HORSEY *notices a very large insect on Dumb Dog's back, and would have something to say about it, only*

the march of events carries him though the door, followed by DOUBLE SHUFFLE in a similar state of mind. The POLICEMAN is not interested in scarabs or whatever they are. They disappear and their steps recede.

After a moment, a FIGURE is made out in the door looking into the slightly illuminated darkness where the candle and book remain on the table.

FIGURE (*softly*).

Is everyone asleep? (*No answer. The FIGURE comes stealthily into the candle-light, and is seen to be the Actor with some reminiscence of Bricriu hanging about him*). No, not a snore. (*He looks towards the dimly seen beds*).

Holding your breaths, I'm thinking, in a fright.
I've come at this ungodly hour to get
The three old coins I threw you in mistake.
I hope to heaven you haven't palmed them off
On some poor waitress in a restorong.
I'd hate to lose those heirlooms that have come
From some old king they say was an ancestor
Up in the County Louth. They brought me luck
Each time I'd a new part. How they got mixed
With sixpences beats me. (*Looks searchingly around*) Well I'll be hanged
If I'm not talking to an empty house.
Maybe it will fill up again, God knows.

Well that's so much the simpler for getting back
The three spare ancient robes I left behind
This morning, with my head a hive of words
That buzzed from some rich garden in the skies
And set me treading air. (*He sees nothing under
the bed, but his eye is caught by something hang-
ing in the darkness behind the beds*). Now,
think of that.

All nice and tidy, each on its own nail,
Hung by a hand that had more order than mine!
(*He proceeds to gather them on his arm*).
Sorry to break your ranks—Phew! atmosphere!—
And texture—ancient shoddy! (*He brings a
ragged bundle into the light: it separates off into
three dilapidated coats: he drops them on the
floor*). Some sea-change here!

Perhaps a joke . . . Perhaps more than a joke.
Those three bright playboys might be anything
Between what they appear and what they are,
Whatever *that* is. (*Picks up the book*) What! a
book of poems!

Choice reading for those lads. All thumb'd and
marked.

One by AE, "The Vesture of the Soul." (*He
recites*).

I pitied one whose tattered dress
Was patched, and stained with dust and rain,
He smiled on me, I could not guess
The viewless spirit's wide domain.

(*Awed*). "He smiled on me." Maybe *they're*
smiling at me!

(*He looks around as if he felt them in the air*).

He said, 'The royal robe I wear
Trails all along the fields of light:
It's silent blue and silver bear
For gems the starry dust of night . . .

(*He closes the book and lays it reverently beside
the candle*).

My God! supposing . . . supposing it was
true? . . .

*He hears a noise as of someone coming up the stairs;
and snuffs out the candle.*

IV

THE ISLAND OF CAPTIVITY

ii

The same as before. The night has passed, with whatever adventures The Three Sons of Doel Dermait had in it. The bedding that was carefully laid out has been apparently hurriedly thrown aside.

AEDH enters carrying a reed basket, and proceeds to remove the butts of burnt-out torches from the walls, and the dead ashes of the fire. While he does so he chants, with an occasional yawn:

*Come day, go night—or the other way round,
The high-headed wave comes down in a splash.
The glittering torch is a smudge on the ground.
The fire for King's Sons is a handful of ash
Swept out by a serving-man, sir.
In spite of the bragging of muscle or brain,
Who shackles the baker will want for bread;
And the hands that serve are the hands that
remain.
Now riddle me that (as the riddler said),
Come riddle me that, if you can, sir.*

BLANAD enters with no sign of preparation of breakfast for the Sons of a King about her, but laden with the importance of imminent communication.

BLANAD.

I told you something magical had come
Into this island.

AEDH. Yes, but there was something
Much more important that you did *not* tell me.

BLANAD.

God help us! what was that?

AEDH. What magic *is*.

BLANAD.

Now fancy starting with an argument,
When all that is awake this blèssed morning
Is chanting certainty.

AEDH. *That* says plain nothing,
And things made certain lose their tastiness.

BLANAD (*with increasing enthusiasm as her thought
develops*).

Except the things that *you* would like to know.
Well, magic is . . . just magic: something different;
Larger—or smaller; something that can't be done,
And yet *is* done in spite of eyes and ears;
Some curtain lifted, you on either side,
Looking from here to there, or there to here,
Seeing great wonder at the thither end,
Forgetting your own wonder. Mark my words:
Magic in heaven has the smell of earth,
And on the earth a shine that comes from heaven.
And through it all there moves a restlessness,
Some push that will give nothing peace or ease,

But sets a wind through a steep gap in hills,
Nose up, in frantic haste to be elsewhere;
As if it was beneath its dignity
To hear the talk of water among stones,
Or meet the look in eyes of hyacinths,
Or stand and answer back a gabbling bird—
And all because a wheel must whirl and whirl,
Or else goodbye to what its whirling breeds—
Kings, and King's Sons, Jailers, and you, and
me.

AEDH.

That's only flowery talk that's fit for bards.

BLANAD.

Maybe a bard has spoken through my mout
I have an ancestor—

AEDH.

I know that story,

But it does not explain what magic is.

BLANAD.

Be what it may, there's something it is *not*.

AEDH.

Well, out with it, and let us face the worst.

BLANAD.

Whatever magic is or isn't, it's not
Something that can be killed by being explained.
Explain the Gods and they're no more than men.
Nothing is past the mind that understands it,
And understanding is the death of joy,

Taking the wonder out of wonderful things—
Unless a bigger wonder lies behind.

AEDH.

Why wont you tell your story plain and straight,
Instead of twisting things beyond your wit?
And I near dead with turning all the night
This side and that, half in my head, half out,
Not knowing was I dreaming or awake,
Hearing with goose-flesh and a shrivelled mouth
Some hunt around the sky, or underground,
Or maybe, worst of all, in my own mind.
And here you keep me hung on tenterhooks,
Not knowing for sure what magic is or does,
And you puffed up with some discovery
Would redden up the ears of brainy men
Who know so much they don't know what they
know.

BLANAD.

I'm keeping more than you on tenterhooks—
Eyes that were dim, and now are dancing flames,
Mouths that were dumb and now are sounding
horns.

I saw them round that hero when he ended
Green Eochu and his jailing of King's Sons.

AEDH.

What hero?

BLANAD. Let you hold your clattering tongue
And not upset my gallop. I declare

I saw them round that hero, whoever he was,
When he snuffed out the flame in Eochu Glas.
And what is more, the air, even in this place,
Is full of watchfulness and listening
For what there is to tell, because the tale
Has heights and depths beyond the telling of it,
I never rightly knew until this morning
That all the flatness of the land and sea,
And all men's boasting stretched across the world
Along the surface of their memories,
Are less than half the truth. The other half,
The things that bards will chant of ages hence,
Or chanted long ago if we could hear,
Go up and down, and never move an inch
To right or left; and all that life is worth
Is only overhead or underfoot,
Or maybe in or out—I don't know which.

AEDH (*fidgetting*).

Then tell what you *do* know.

BLANAD.

Well, in the dusk

Last night, the three playactors from the ship
Came upon Coirpre Cundael, and that giant,
After my telling him of their arrival,
Was geared and strung for fight—God knows
for what.

AEDH.

Nothing, say I. The everlasting quarrel
Of giants and great heroes has become

At the appointed time. I've heard it said
That when a thing the knowledgeable men
Can't put a name upon has come to pass,
Two moons are in the sky. Well, tell me now,
Have you in all your mortal history seen
Two *suns* at dawn?

AEDH. I have seen a lot of suns
And I stretched out on the long grass at noon
Facing the one there is, blinking my eyes;
And twice as many when I knuckled them.
That's proper sight: two only is seeing cross-eyed.

BLANAD.

That's all *you* know. You saw them separate
Because, for all the crowd, there was but one.
But what I saw was two, not separate,
But one within the other; the outer one
Red gold; the inner, like red potter's clay.
"*That* signals something deep," says I, and turned
To ask my sister could she tell its meaning.
But she was off after some living wonder
We'll hear about before we are much older.
And when I looked again, *there* was that hero
Striding from ebb to flood across the strand,
His face all shiny like the gold-red sun
His head was hiding; and the outer sun
Strode with him like a shield slung on his back.
I'd take my oath on any poet-stave
There was a double sunrise that will make

This day the subject of a hundred songs—
One sunrise on the usual sea and land,
And one inside myself, and everything,
And that great hero maybe was himself
A risen sun.

AEDH. Great Dagda! I could name
That hero in three guesses, or maybe in one;
But that would spoil your story, and spoiling
stories
Beats every other crime.

BLANAD. Mine can't be spoiled
By you, or by a much more brainy man,
For it began before the world was made,
Or maybe made the world; and it will last
To tell the snuffing out of sun and moon.

AEDH.
Then why not stick to it, and keep your feet
On steady earth, not prancing round the sky?

BLANAD.
Well, when that light split open Eochu's valley
And speared him out of sleep, he turned and
growled
Like a chained dog, at threatened rivalry,
That brags aloud to keep his courage up:
"Is there a miserable fighter there
Asking for death?" With that there came a voice,
And if it came from the bright-weaponed hero,

Or from the sky with the red sun for mouth,
Who knows?

AEDH (*excited*). It answered?

BLANAD. "He who stands without
Asks not for life or death, for he gives both."

AEDH (*more excited*).

And then?

BLANAD. Green Eochu said: "That is a voice
That does not please! It is the angry man's
Out of Muirthemne."

AEDH (*delighted with himself*). I had guessed as
much!

BLANAD (*impatiently*).

Then guess the rest—or let me tell the truth.

AEDH.

Guessing in sometimes better sport than knowing.

BLANAD.

And what is knowing but a kind of guessing
Round things unknown?

AEDH (*also impatiently*). Now who is upsetting your
gallop?

Go on! . . . Go on!

BLANAD. They fought up hill, down dale,
Across the river, through the level land,
Crouching and springing, clashing shield on
shield.

Sometimes their thrusting spears met point on
point, . . .

And broke in sparks that made the sun go pale,
And shot like meteors on November nights
Across the sky. Sometimes the warriors leapt
So far apart, I missed them, and was dazed
With awful noises, as if day and night,
Summer and winter, jailers and things jailed,
Fought a last fight. Suddenly there they were,
Twisting and turning in a raging dance,
Till one of them, or maybe both, laughed out
At some wild jest that was beyond my wit.

AEDH (*shrewdly*).

The hero from the ship laughed most?

BLANAD.

He did.

AEDH (*knowingly*).

He *would*!

BLANAD. And then he frowned, as if to say
"Time's up," and backed Green Eochu to the sea;
And on the edge the fight went in and out,
This way and that, and might have ebbed and
flowed,
Or come and gone and come, like night and day,
Until the end of time, they were so matched
In craft and energy. But in a wink
The hero's head was in the sun again,
And in his hand that paralysing spear
Roared like the Seven Seas.

AEDH (*carried away*).

It *did*! It *would*!

O Bolg son of Buan! I see it all:

The planted feet. The head and hand thrown
back.

The leap of lightning, that was polished bone
Pointed for sudden death, with a shrill cry
Of monstrous ocean-enmity. And then
The stroke, the stagger, and the clattering slump
Of that gigantic troubler of the world
Out of his age-long tyranny, to take
The last swift thrust, that was most merciful
In setting him from his own slavery free. . . .

BRIGID *enters excitedly, breaking the rhapsody of AEDH.*
AEDH (*muddled, stammering*).

And, after that . . . what happened . . . after that?

BRIGID (*with a glance, as in duty bound, at the tossed
bedding*).

Talk, childish talk, of something past and gone!
"What happened after that?" The question is,
What's happening now? What are *we* going
to do,

When everything that has the power to move
Is moving?

AEDH (*portentously*). Moving where?

BRIGID. I'll tell you that
When they have got there. All I know for sure
Is that they all are moving the one way,

But whether north or south or east or west
Beats me to tell. (*To Blanad*) You saw the
rising sun?

BLANAD.

I saw *two* rising suns, the outer one
Red gold, the inner like red potter's clay,
And knew some Druid magic was afoot,
Some wonder bards would make a story of.

BRIGID.

Well, when the hero finished Eochu Glas,
There came a red-gold colour on the sea,
So clear you'd think, did you but dip your hand,
The fiery liquor from some giant's veins
Would drip between your fingers. "*That*," says I,
"Means something." But before I had it plain,
There came a sound that had no keening in it
Chanting a man or woman to the grave,
But triumph long and earnestly desired;
A marching chant that had the ancientness
Of some far past and some far future in it.

AEDH (*himself again*).

Nothing about the present?

BRIGID (*superiorly*). What's the present

But coming-from and going-to? no grain
Of substance you could carry in your palm.

AEDH.

My own opinion is that every minute
Is a thin pack-mule on a foggy path

Between two panniers slung across his back
Stuffed with what-we-have-been and we-shall-be.

BLANAD.

That may be so; but like all hairy talk
It smothers facts. *I'm* famishing to know
What *words* were on the chant.

BRIGID.

How could I tell

When every tongue within the Seven Seas,
And some from far beyond, and some beyond
Even what is beyond the Seven Seas,
And some that had the shiver of starlight in them,
Mixed in a chant like waves upon a shore,
Or wind within a forest? Then my eyes
Broke the bewildering wonder in my ears,
And saw the captives of dead Eochu Glas
Rush from their cells in hillsides and in hollows,
Chanting and marching to the water's-edge,
Headed by no one else but the Three Sons
Who left their beds before the hint of dawn,
Roused, it may be, by some prophetic touch
Out of the sky or maybe from the earth,
Or maybe by a dream out of the night.
But at the margin of the red-gold sea,
They neither stopped nor stripped, but went
straight on,
And bathed and chanted, and, believe my word,
Came out all dressed alike in shining robes
That slowly dropped the red and held the gold,

And set their folds flowing one way, like waves
Before a breeze.

AEDH (*hinting scepticism*). I've seen the like in dreams.

BRIGID.

You have, have you? Then if I'm talking dreams,
Look there! (*She throws open a door*).

BLANAD (*looking at something in the distance*).

A mighty crowd of healthy men—
Or maybe handsome women: they're so like,
I can't tell which is which; and all dressed up
The same as they were going to a fair!

BRIGID.

What fair would they be going to and they
Without a chariot or a shandredan,
Or anything to go on but their feet?

BLANAD.

Look at them now! There go the three King's Sons
All by themselves, gliding into the west
Where Doel Dermait maybe has his fort!

BRIGID.

Behold ye now, the Hound and his two friends
Head eastward for their ship, the shiny crowd
Marching behind! Lucky for them *that* craft
Was built by Druid skill, and sails the seas
Without a sickening roll.

AEDH (*who has been taking a look out*).

And takes all comers,

shandredan: carriage.

Be they but one, or scores, or maybe millions,
With neither loneliness nor overcrowding.

BLANAD (*retrospectively*).

That's magic for you

AEDH. No, just commonsense:

Dropping accumulated this-and-that
Into the sea, and carrying aboard
The simple garment of reality
That fits as neatly as the rush's skin
Upon its pith.

BRIGID. If that be so, and not
One of your fancies, there is room to spare
For more than the freed prisoners of this island.

AEDH (*profoundly*).

What's happening here this day is for all days
And all the world.

BLANAD. Then why aren't we among them
On their excursion?

AEDH. That's a mystery
That needs unravelling. I have a thought—

BRIGID (*from the door*).

Let you now choke your thought, and put your
eyes
On that great fuss below and round the ship,
As if she had a million silver feet
Dancing the sea to foam.

BLANAD (*joining her*). I'd say the fish
Of the Seven Seas had got some secret word

Of this day's doings, and are joining in,
Making an escort of the hosts of Lir
Disguised in scale and fin.

AEDH. More poetry,
Maybe by that old bard. But, tell me this;
What right has she, or any ship, to move
With no cloud in the heavens, and ne'er a tree
Fidgetting at the smallest breath of wind?

BRIGID.
That's easy seen by anyone with eyes;
For what's that flurry at her wagging sail?

BLANAD.
I'd say the birds out of the seven skies
Had got more sense than we have, and had joined
The fish to make a convoy for the ship,
And with their wings fan up a freshening breeze.

AEDH (*after a shrewd look out*).
And when have sober eyes seen sober fish
Smother themselves by swimming *with* a stream?
Or birds fan up a wind in front of them,
And ruffle up their feathers flying *with* it?
(*He draws them impressively from the door as if
he had something important to impart. He
speaks very solemnly to Brigid*).
You said all things that have the power to move
Are moving.

Lir: the God of the Sea.

BRIGID. And I said no less than truth,
 As you have seen.

AEDH. You said just *half* the truth;
 For nothing moves unless it moves on something
 That *doesn't* move. The panting runner's feet
 Have need of steady ground. Keep *that* in mind,
 And it will bring much peace, feeling the earth
 Faithful below your tread.

BRIGID. You're getting wise
 In your old age.

AEDH (*with tenderness and depth*). ,
 And you that see my wisdom
 Are just as wise, because that double sunrise
 Brought others liberty, and, I believe,
 Touched *us* with light, which in the end perhaps
 Is just as good.

BLANAD. And what's the good of that,
 If all our wisdom leaves us stranded here
 With ne'er a hand's-turn to put by the day
 In service to oneself or to another?

BRIGID.
 And ne'er a soul to talk with but ourselves,
 Till we detest the sound of our own voices—

BLANAD.
 Or shrivel up at the surrounding silence
 Like snails in salt.

AEDH. Sound . . . silence . . . all are one.
 Sure who could tell what talk was on a mouth

But for the silence in between each word?
And maybe *that* is the best part of speech.

BRIGID (*indicating the tossed bedding*).

And what has *this* to say, that is so silent
It must be stuffed with talk (*kicking a pillow*)?

BLANAD. *That's past and done with.*

BRIGID.

Maybe if we had hurried after them
Instead of blathering here, the three King's Sons
Might have been glad to have them as a keep-
sake,
Insects and blue and gold and red and all.

AEDH.

They might—and they might *not*. Let you
remember
That all things face two ways at the one time,
At least all things on this side of what sits
Behind all things, and holds them in its hand.
And that ancestral beetle and the rings
Of royal blue, wise gold, and busy red,
That here were dumb encouragers of hope
Of restoration of a lost estate,
Might there (wherever *there* is) be reminders
Of degradation, or its prophecy.

BLANAD.

Anyhow, we're too late.

AEDH. *Perhaps too late*

For day that's past is up before the dawn

Of something that will be that these may serve—
Unless my bones have lost prophetic skill;
Or all things from the regulated sun
Down to the summer midge, that were content
With chains of time and space, have broken through
The fascination of captivity
Into the heavy bonds that freedom brings.

BRIGID (*resigned*).

What will be will be. Before they're out of sight
We'll go and wave good-bye from the white
rampart.

(*She opens the door. The OTHERS follow her*).

AEDH (*awed by the vast silence outside*).

Dagda! the Sword of Tethra, that could talk
Day in day out of battles, talks no more;
And Sons of Kings, and Red Branch wanderers,
And giant jailers, and freed prisoners,
And all the rabble and hubbub of some dream
From which they have awakened, or *we* have,
Is out of sight and hearing. Maybe now,
In the great quiet at a story's end,
Before another story has begun,
We'll get some sense out of the universe.

They tiptoe out as if afraid of awakening a sleeper.

VI

THE HERO'S RETURN

Straight as a sea-bird on green water-ways,
Led by no sun or star of mortal sight,
The Druid vessel drove through dark and light,
Glistened at morn and gloomed in evening's haze.

Through her thrilled ropes a rapturously freed
Home-heading wind outraced the running tides.
Whitely about her stem and by her sides
Crisp-curling waves attested silent speed,

And shook, as flakes of dark down slopes of snow,
Sea-wandering weed from isles she travelled
toward.

Dim through the dark beyond her swaying board
Glimmered the moony phosphorescent glow.

Tall silken sails broidered with gems and gold
Curved in the shade of dusk and shine of dawn;
And through them rose, as from a swimming
swan,

Song—but deep song that life, not death, fore-
told;

A song that man's most cunning word-craft mars,
Soul of all songs that life's fulfilment frees,
Mixed with a murmur from the Seven Seas
And a responsive shiver from the stars.

CHORUS OF LIBERATION

DRUIDS.

*Before the Gods came forth,
Or Earth had found a name,
Or set were south and north,
From ageless Being came
Silence that fathered Sound,
Blindness that into Sight
Blossomed, and the profound
Darkness that mothered Light.*

*Unto the primal Dust
And the ancestral Wave
Life, in aeonian trust,
The gift of living gave.
And into these, and more,
Was breathed creative Fire—
In finite things a core
Of infinite desire.*

*In fleeting things and fixed,
Spirit with substance blent.
Through slow descension mixed
The hunger of ascent;
Till through the earth-bound sod
Dim dreams of Freedom ran,
And towards the Man in God
Forth stretched the God in Man.*

BARDS.

*Hot in the hill-stream's haste
From its high fountain-head
Down to the wide sea's waste,
The feet of Freedom sped.
Inscrutably her flight
Was clenched in folded wing.
In feathered song's delight
Fair Freedom was the spring;
The royal in her rule,
The rose whom Beauty crowned,
Who strewed her bountiful
Oblation on the ground
When she her petals cast
At feet of fadeless power
In all white roses past
And whiteness yet to flower.*

WOMEN.

*Behind the child's low laugh,
Beneath its peevish cry;
In urge to clutch or quaff,
In stretch to live or die;
Unknown among things known,
Darkly through driving spear,
Mutely in mother's moan,
Faintly in holy fear,
Sure in the shaping hand,
Seeing and singing brain,*

*Moved Freedom to expand
Invincibly her reign;
And with her sweetness wrought
Man's rankness to perfume,
And ray the thorns of Thought
With perfect Beauty's bloom.*

HEROES.

*Blest were all hearts that drew
From earth's and heaven's accord
Dreams and desires that knew
The heart's most high reward
Less in the deed well done
Than doing's jeopardy;
Nor more in Freedom won
Than striving to be free:
Who deemed their labour vain
And vanity their strife,
Yet strove with limb and brain,
And, dying, joyed in life;
Because no earthiness
Could Earth's desire fulfil,
And all her fluctuant stress
Worked out the Spirit's Will.*

*ALL (to Dagda and Dana).
To Thee, O Father of Light!
O Mother of manifold Ways!*

*From the day that has banished our night
Our voices are lifted in praise
That Thou from Thy heaven hast bent,
That our struggle towards heaven be won,
And out of Thy bounty hast sent
The gift of the conquering One.
He is son of the Lord of the Sky.
And son of the Chieftain of Earth.
He has published our yearning on high,
And scattered Thy dew on our dearth.
We have carved the Hound on the prow
Of the soul's returning ship.
We have set Thy Light on our brow.
We have shaped His Word on our lip.*

*From the burden of herds and lands,
From the bondage of hearth and kin;
From the hardness in spear-bearing hands,
And the loss by the legions that win,
He has loosed us, our Hero and Friend.
He has mixed in our methers the bliss
Of the wine of the hazel, whose end
Is music whose rapture is this:
That quenched are the flames of desire:
That the broken in heart are made whole:
That brows once darkened with ire
Are fair with the friendship of soul:
That mercy has banished might*

*And shivered the sword that slays,
O Father of Life and Light!
O Mother of merciful Ways!*

*From the questioning mind and its needs,
From the faith we have failed to fulfil,
We have turned pure purpose to deeds
That are bent to the work of Thy Will.
From our hearts in response ran
The Law of Thy Love that gives,
With the Freedom of Woman and Man,
The Freedom of all that lives.
For down to the dust of the earth,
And up to the star-dust above,
Of Thee has Freedom had birth,
And the shaper of Freedom is Love—
Love whose dispassionate sight
Makes holy the heart with its rays,
O Father of perfect Light!
O Mother of wondrous Ways!*

*

*

*

*

Wafted by winds that lifted her along
Green mounded waves, from isle to isle the ship
Carried to watching eye and wondering lip
Swift nights and days of reminiscent song;

And stories of freed prisoners whose trace
Was lost when thrawing gale and thrashing spray
Swept suddenly the ship's untroubled way,
And bore them chanting out of time and place.

And when the light of laughter on the brow
Dimmed in the thought of distant hills that burned
With welcome-home and rest, the Heroes turned
Straightly towards Eiré the Hound-carven prow.

Deep in their eyes, as in the smooth-sea glass
The unmoving sky moved with their speeding
shade,
Thoughts of high deeds, in chanted realms essayed,
Gave to the passing day what could not pass—

The glimpse of life beyond the senses' range,
That set on sense the purpose of the soul,
And gave to wavering impulse the control
Of the unchanging mixed with what must change.

But, shadowed by the ship's broad silken wings,
Tanned seamen, thinking thoughts beyond the
sea,
Found all the promise of felicity
In the far call of common human things.

* * * *

Labour for love the taut limb cannot tire,
The clean heart-longing of home-hungry men
To feel familiar at their feet again
The dedicated isle of their desire.

Therefore, with stars below from stars above,
Through smothering mist and under freckling sun,
They toiled at rope and sail till, toiling done,
They smote the shore of Eirè with their love.

Beyond the prow that ridged the sloping sand
Where green waves whitened, turned, and shimmered down,
They saw bole-grey, branch-green, grass-green,
earth-brown
Of woodland, meadow-land and tillage-land.

Good to the senses were the scents of home,
The songs of birds, the gleam of daffodils;
And good the quiet converse of the hills
After the fuss and wrangle of the foam;

And very good the joy in hearth and wife
And children, and young voices' happy hum,
And the simplicities that make the sum
Of life, and hints of something more than life.

Dim in the dusk, half-circled in the glow
And smell of ember-turf, the talk went round

Of hero-deeds, and in the air a sound
Of song whose burden passed their wit to know,

Yet gave, through tongue and eloquent right hand,
The spirit's leap from life's confining scarp
That found a swelling voice in rann and harp . . .
And grew into the legends of a land.

* * * *

Meanwhile, before proud lips had learned to pray,
Or time had vexed the vision of the Gael,
Cuchulain, Laeg and Lugaidh (says the tale)
Behind Black Sanglain, yoked with Macha's Grey,

Sped Emain-wards through crystal morning air,
By budding trees and fields of coming corn,
Until, at the keen question of a horn,
Laeg haunched the horses, foam-flaked, panting,
where

Bright stood against the sunrise, redly flung
Across the runs of scuttering hare and mouse,
King's House, and Speckled House, and the
proud House
Where the ambiguous Red Branch trophies hung,

Ranked in applause of the victorious hand;
Yet, from the hatred that is born of hate,

Hinting how the vicissitudes of fate
May lurk within a blood-stained broken brand.

But, deeper than the mortal rust that clings
To victor crown and unvictorious crutch,
Cuchulain felt the signifying touch
Of far enchantment in familiar things.

For there, ignoring song of isle and sea,
Lay out his hero-share of meat and drink
Untasted, and across the wavering brink
Of time and place murmured a Mystery;

The Mystery of heavenly drink and food
Mixed in the stuff of earthly bread and mead,
When one, from sensual incantations freed,
On the veiled verge of his own Godhead stood.

* * * *

Into the Speckled House the Heroes stepped,
Where, out of reach of anger or alarm,
In their own peace, free of the frenzied arm,
The Red Branch weapons innocently slept.

There, in the slanted sun, reflected flame
From jewelled hilts reddened on famous fields,
And specks of light glinting from dinted shields
And drinking-horns, gave the great House its
name.

Then went Cuchulain, silent, solemn-eyed,
Less like a Hero counting future foes
Than like a Druid at a ritual's close,
And hung, in glittering quiet side by side,

The sword men called "Hard-headed," being
annealed
Nine times beyond what shook a foe with fear;
And Bolg son of Buan's mighty spear
Of bones of a sea-monster, that would yield

To no dull blade smithied from passive land,
But, edged and energised by swinging seas,
Passed on through chanted genealogies,
And, charged with triumph, reached Cuchulain's
hand.

And in its place between the sword and spear
Cuchulain hung the shield whose dark device,
Seen on war's ridge, turned foemen's blood to ice,
And stemmed their spate with swirling winds of
fear.

In his tense hands trembled the tenderness
For things gone past their purpose, now that Life
Wove of its substance, past the scars of strife,
The naked soul's invulnerable dress.

And so, unarmed, but being himself a sword
To break all bonds, a spear of light revealed,
And, selfless, of defenceless selves the shield,
He passed into the House of Uladh's Lord.

* * * *

Within high walls of red yew, strongly grown
Through long lost histories of leaf and wing,
Robed for high converse, Conchubar the King,
Sat on the luminous carbuncled throne.

Close to the throne gleamed moonlike at its side
The silver rod for silence only rung
By kings; and on the silver ceiling hung
Birds golden-plumed and clawed and jewel-eyed.

And there, in morning's young adventurous hour
Whose hands for noon's emblazoned trophy reach,
Cuchulain in grave ceremonial speech
Retold the story of victorious power.

And through red passion of an ancient fame
Glimmered a white dispassion, older still,
Out of calm light of the celestial Will
Behind the flicker of man's wilful flame.

So when the tale was to the end unrolled
(Yet all untold the saying it implied),
And the proud king waxed with access of pride
(Because to power, power only may be told),

Cuchulain, Laeg and Lugaidh, duty done,
Behind Black Sanglain yoked with Macha's
Grey,
Sped ringing swinging on the westward way
To meet the curve of the descending sun

Before it touched the far Atlantic wave;
To hear the swish of swans, the robin's rhyme,
And fill their breasts with breath of Connacht
thyme,
And rest within the royalty of Maeve;

And, in a rush-strown quietness, beyond
Feasting and music, when the heart is stilled,
Tell the high story of a quest fulfilled
That would dissolve the Curse of Eochu Rond.

VII
EPILOGUE : AT CRUACHAN OF
THE BARDS

Twilight on Cruachan of the Bards now fell,
Dulling the redness of a rowan tree
About whose roots a stream's soliloquy
Charmed a great snake that watched its precinct well.

His winkless eye had seen first day begin:
Her branch had bloomed through countless days
and nights—
For there are berries no bleak winter blights,
And serpents that have never sloughed a skin.

And there were other dim enchanted things
To make a horse twitch an enquiring ear,
And evil-minded men go cold with fear;
Vast birds that wafted poison from their wings,

And flame-eyed swine whose ravenous delight
Rooted through prosperous fields a ruining way;
That slept in their dark sorceries by day,
And made their day of man's oblivious night.

, * * * *

Hard by the fairy hill where Queen Etain
Had come with Midir, sovereign of the Sidhe,
Through Maeve's great palace wafts of minstrelsy
Went, and a stir in banquet-hall and bawn;

For her deep-chested runners in relays
Had brought great tidings home on speeding heel
By paths that never knew a chariot's wheel,
Where bramble scrambled over flinty ways;

And past the lure of hospitable dun;
Up hills where only goats grazed ridge on ridge;
And through deep glens where the complaining midge
Made summer of a springtime afternoon.

* * * *

Warm welcome clustered at the door of Maeve
And Ailell, where their daughter Finavar,
Through eyes of eagle-stretch, had seen afar
Swift-winged birds and an on-rushing wave

That were not birds or wave, but high-flung sods
From hooves that thundered to their lightning speed,
And dust of wheels that bore from a high deed
Heroes that had the poise of demi-gods.

dun: a fortified dwelling.

Behind Maeve's eyes a royal whimsy ran
That had outstripped the foot of destiny,
And fashioned circumstance to the decree
That all true tales should end as they began.

For at her signal, swiftly from beyond
Low Connacht hills, in the declining light,
Speeding well-horsed to meet the fall of night,
Came Findchoem, and her father, Eochu Rond,

Whose curse had sent Cuchulain on the quest
Of news of Doel Dermait's exiled sons.
"Swiftly the river to the ocean runs,"
Maeve mused, "and after that come peace and rest."

And when the chief of charioteers drew rein
And to the horse-boys gave the steaming pair,
Hardly they knew the Black from Grey, their hair
Being masked by the thick dust of hill and plain.

Then, weaponless as when unweaponed born,
Invincible as childhood is to men
Of childlike heart, who live through it again
Life screened by mother-love from hate and scorn,

Cuchulain swordless, spearless, shieldless came
Across Maeve's threshold, answering smile with smile,
Bearing beyond the smirch of sense or guile
The calm insignia of sufficing fame.

* * * *

Across the Hall of Audience the gold glare
Of sundown dazzled eyes it glorified,
So that the Son of Lugh alone descried
The Lord of Light, beneath whose flaming hair

Gleamed an affinity no eye could see
Save his, whose spirit, inwardly illumed,
Had passed through light and darkness, and resumed
The ancient burden of divinity.

Out of the smouldering core of splendour, spread
Where day and night for night-long parting met,
Came the last burnished blade of day, and set
High salutation on Cuchulain's head.

Whereat the bards, voice tuned to voice, as one
Thrilling to deep inexplicable things,
Timed to the quickened pulse of throbbing strings,
Chanted their valediction to the sun.

EVENING CHANT TO LUGH

i

*Thy light has left the topmost tree—
But no! Thou hast Thy constant place.
The tree has left Thy light, and we
Have turned our faces from Thy face.*

*One is Thy gift to man and beast,
To opening leaf and folded wing;
Day for life's labour and for feast,
And night for rich remembering.*

ii

*Thy burnished symbol soars or sinks,
But neither day nor night can part
The ancient heraldry that links
The meanest with the Mighty Heart.*

*Within thine unextinguished blaze
Our human sparkle homely glows.
To Thee our dark instinctive praise
From our beclouded godhood goes.*

iii

*Forth from Thine exultation ran
Beauty with eyes divinely lit.
And of Thy grace Thou gavest man
The sense and soul to savour it.*

*Thou hast enkindled in his eyes
Sight that Thy veiled intention saw;
And set on his proud enterprise
The fiat of unchanging law.*

IV

*Going, Thou bidest. Thou dost keep
Thy state where shining Gods go pale,
Yet hast Thy dwelling in the deep
Imagination of the Gael.*

*Thy light has left the topmost tree;
But in our hearts Thou hast Thy place
In darkness as in light, and we
Have turned our faces to Thy face.*

* * * *

Round Cruachan's rampart in the deepening dark
The fairy legions flocked from hill and dale;
On dimmest orb laid not the lightest veil,
And trod the dewy grass without a mark.

Three counts of fifty ghostly girls in dress
Of green-edged purple swayed from side to side,
Wailing the death of one who had not died,
Finding much sweet in fancied bitterness.

But through their ranks, shearing as shears a knife
Of triple keenness, went the circling dance
Of spirits freed from bonds of circumstance,
Pulsing with inextinguishable life.

And from enchanted earth the pigmy troll,
And from their halls the tall immortal Sidhe,
Circled the walls of royal revelry
To catch the chanted saga of the soul.

On cushioned throne with silver front and bar
Sat Ailell and beside him Cruachan's Queen;
And on his left, in conquering beauty's mien,
The silver-throated, bird-eyed Finavar.

On Maeve's right hand he of the Golden Chain,
Within whose mind great wonderment had stirred
A master-wish, waited the fated word
That should assuage the fever of the brain.

And what of those who silent sit apart
In garments of simplicity arrayed?
What need they of enthronement who have made
Sovereign ascension of the conquered heart?

Shall they who know the spirit's radiance clutch
Dim phantoms by the lures of passion lit;
Or they who mingle in the infinite
Covet the crude redundancy of touch?

Through Findchoem's eyes Cuchulain looks beyond
The boon the unregenerate body asks;
And in the sunlight of his spirit basks
The no more dreamy daughter of Eochu Rond.

From the piled hearth where a shrill cricket calls,
The flicker of the blazing beechen logs
Glow in the amber eyes of mighty dogs,
Couchant but keen; and casts on oaken walls

Within whose crevices the grey mouse plods,
And over carven yew and bands of bronze,
Tall shadows that, as trees in breaking dawns,
Waver like presences of listening Gods.

And in the dimness past the quivering reach
Of torchlight and of firelight, one, so old
He might have been reborn, heard, and retold
In after years, in rapt harp-smitten speech,

A tale of what has been, is, and shall be,
That speaks through breaking wave and waking bird,
And in the silence linking word with word
Is half remembrance and half prophecy.

So through the rafters rang
The song Cuchulain sang,
Refashioning the tale

Of magic ship and sail,
And penitential ísle
Where the soul strives awhile,
Till word and work fulfil
The universal Will,
And One made spirit-free
Breaks the captivity
Of Doel Dermait's Sons.
Loudly the story runs
Around the hollow halls,
And through the arrased walls
Echoes, as does the loud
Thunder from cloud to cloud,
Impatient to disclose
What thing the lightning shows.

Then came a loftier tone
Than chanted deeds had known,
When, after ísle and sea,
It sang the Mystery
Of bread and meat and mead
Spread for the body's need,
As though not yet had ceased
A royal Red Branch feast,
And the heroic theme
Were but a moment's dream
Built on a challenge flung
By Bricriu-bitter-tongue.

At that portentous thing:
The Sun-God's Son took wing
In song that, with its rise
Into its native skies,
Sounded the inner word
Of tree and wave and bird
And the dim gleam that ran
Through the blind minstrel, Man,
Who in his spirit's night
Counted his darkness light.
Into the Hero's chant
Came the unhesitant
Vision of things afar
Mingled in things that are.
He sang one Eye that peers
Through eyes of countless years;
That holds implicitly
Past, present and to-be;
And the sure answer brings
To all man's questionings.

And I the vision shared.
I, blessed with hearing, heard
The single sound that blent
As on one instrument;
The sound of harp and drum,
Songs past and songs to come;
Each, in its place and part,

A pulse of Dagda's heart,
The Harper through whose hand
Throbbeth the sea and land;
So that the whistling grass,
When the wind's breathings pass,
No less accepted strain
Raises than heart and brain
In the rapt poet's speech
That to high heaven would reach,
Yet, bound by beak and wing,
No subtler song would sing
Than bird and wave and grass
When song's incitements pass.
And, praised no less than these,
Through song's interstices
I heard mute music made
By answering sun and shade
In the stupendous rhyme
Of timelessness and time.

Then, in a rapture wrought
Of no beclouded thought,
Nor fashioned in the fire
Of wavering desire,
But lifted on the stress
Of the soul's silentness;
Upon the rush-laid floor,
Vibrant with song no more

The Hero, Sun-eyed, stood
A moment in the mood
Of ecstasy that sees
Majestic Mysteries.
With his ascension came
Descending Flame and Flame
That, in heart-stilling awe
I, graced with seeing, saw
Through calm, clear eyes—the pure
Irradiant vestiture
Of the De Danann Powers
Through whom the darkness flowers
And to fruition strives;
One Life in myriad lives
Bound by the skyward pull
In all things beautiful.

And, as the radiance grew,
I, granted knowledge, knew
The joy of his high peers
That through æonian years
Await the certain sign
Of mortal grown divine,
To blaze through earthly airs
Celestial thoroughfares,
And greet arisen, free,
Ancient affinity;
As through the torchlit night,

Light answering to light,
Silent and unamazed,
Godhead on Godhead gazed.

*

*

*

*

In the deep stillness of the storied hour,
Through ember-glow and torches' dimming flame,
Across the thoughts of the hushed hearers came
The scented silence round a full-blown flower;

The quiet of completion that would creep
Under the shuttered eyelids of the night,
As, after lamentation and delight,
The Dagda's Harp murmurs the Tune of Sleep,

When the All-Shepherd calls into His pen
His flock beyond the touch of frost and sun,
Where the long saga of the soul is done,
And life and life's desires begin again.

*

*

*

*

In slumbering ears by spirit-lips were sung
Songs of earth-deeds celestially fulfilled,
Mingled with sweetness wondrously distilled
Out of the speech of Bricriu-bitter-tongue.

And he whose Curse had into blessing turned
(Seeing that all things undeflected move
Through ill to well in life's ascending groove),
Glowed to the light that in his being burned

Kindling beyond the questions of the mind,
The calm assurance of unshaken law;
Giving to sight the deeper sight that saw
Darkness and light inscrutably affined.

*

*

*

*

And when the dawn led on in gold and red
The glittering chariot of immortal day,
The Hound of Uladh, on the sunward way,
Home to the Red Branch and high triumph sped.

REVIEWS

OF JAMES H. COUSINS' POETRY

ORIGINAL EDITIONS.

Artistically Mr. Cousins can only be put below the two leaders of his movement (AE and W. B. Yeats). He has the calm intensity, the subtle strangeness of simplicity, which seem to be as easy as breathing to an Irish poet. *The Nation* (London).

Of the founders of the Irish poetical revival, James H. Cousins was one of the best known . . . his spiritual quest has been unchanging. The poet moves among immortal themes. *Times Literary Supplement* (London).

Rarely is it the fortune of the reviewer to meet with verse of such distinction. *New Ireland Review* (Dublin).

AMERICAN TWO-VOLUME EDITION (A Wandering Harp, 1932, A Bardic Pilgrimage, 1934).

The combination of a leading Irish literary figure with the ripe thought of India has produced . . . an exceptional beauty of form and liveliness of imagination. *The Personalist* (California).

"A Wandering Harp" places him in the front rank of contemporary poets in the English language. *Journal de Geneve* (Switzerland).

KALAKSHETRA ONE-VOLUME EDITION (1940).

The publication by Kalakshetra of Dr. Cousins' life-work in poetry must in any view be reckoned a momentous event in the cultural history of South India . . . Mr. Cousins has dedicated his whole life to the Song-Goddess in her noblest manifestation . . . And we who watch him celebrate with such calm clear utterance his sure vision of truth "ourselves are great." *The Hindu* (Madras, India).

